ONLY RELATIVES INVITED

BY CHARLES SHERMAN

Mr G W Light

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1916

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A Social and a Socialistic Satire

By

CHARLES SHERMAN

Author of

He Comes Up Smiling, The Upper Crust,
A Wise Son, etc.

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CHAPTER I

THE FIRST ARRIVALS

THE great house on the hill basked in the springtime peace and calm like a stout woman placid in the security of millions. Reuben Rubenstein, on his knees near the wide marble steps, tinkering with the hard-used lawn-mower, heard the distant puffing of an automobile and glanced up. Down the slope of vivid well-kept lawn, between the shrubs and century-old trees, he could see the stately gateway, the majestic white pillars and the Applebys' coat-of-arms on a massive bronze shield set in the iron palings. As he looked, the gates swung open and a limousine turned in and took the steep driveway to the house.

"There's the first," giggled the stable-boy,

who, passing with the wheel-barrow, paused a moment to watch appreciatively the quiet approach of the great red car.

"Honest men's oppressors," exclaimed Reuben, as frankly disgusted with the idle rich, as he was Jew. "What right have they to that money they spend while we who make it have none?"

The stable-boy shrugged, unimpressed with the woes of labor. "They stole it; we didn't have the sense," he explained cheerfully. "Be good, and if you can't be good, be rich."

"You're wrong," jeered Reuben, his thin, keen boyish face flushed, his eyes blazing. "Be rich, and if you can't be rich, be damned, that's their motto."

The head gardener glanced down from the terrace at his fourth assistant. "Got a grouch on?" he asked kindly.

"It ain't a grouch," returned Reuben hotly. "It's honest indignation. Look at them with millions more than they can spend, and when the old 'un dies, they get forty millions more."

"Don't be peeved about it none," advised the stable-boy, picking up the wheel-barrow and

disappearing around the house, followed by the head gardener.

Reuben Rubenstein spat derisively and watched the great car as it drew nearer and finally stopped at the steps, not two feet from him. A liveried footman leaped down, opened the door and stood rigidly to one side. Reuben, scorning to act the menial and not to dare raise his eyes to those above him, sat back on his heels and stared rather insolently.

A girl stepped out, a young pretty slip of a girl, with a sweet face, the latest slouch and the last cry in automobile coats. Her eyes were gray and soft and good-natured, her mouth was full and a trifle pouting, and she had practically no chin at all. She stepped aside on the lawn and glanced curiously around. Appraising the value of the place, thought Reuben in pleasurable scorn.

A tall young man alighted and started at once up the terrace steps. Suddenly realizing that he was alone, he paused and glanced back at the girl. He was tall and thin, with a pleasant face. He wore glasses, his narrow mouth was gentle instead of weak and his nose, up-

turned and unexpectedly small for the rest of his face, lent an air of boyishness to his mild expression. Ricky Crane was, as his wife was wont to say, "cute."

"Coming, dear?" he asked, as the footman shut the car door and the machine rolled away. Something in the unblinking scrutiny of the fourth assistant gardener, still on his knees by the disabled lawn-mower, drew Ricky's attention, and even as he spoke, he glanced down into the upturned face of Reuben Rubenstein. He was an agreeable young fellow and he felt called on to say something before this unswerving gaze of a brother man.

"Ah, howdy-do," said he.

Reuben grunted, refusing to touch his hat.

The girl had turned and observed this new and interesting lack of deference. She glanced at her husband and her full sweet mouth dimpled. Ricky stared a moment in mild surprise and then spoke again to his wife:

"Coming, Nel?"

She nodded and followed him up the marble steps, across the marble terrace, and under the gaily colored awning to the front door.

"Ricky," said she, touching her husband's arm, and slightly nodding backward where Reuben, still on his knees, stared after them, "Ricky, I do believe he's an anarchist."

"He's a Jew, my dear," said Ricky, peering through the screen door into the darkened hall. "I hope we aren't the first to come."

"We probably are," said Nel. "It would be just our luck."

"I didn't want to come at all," said Ricky plaintively. "It's so deuced embarrassing to have all us relatives coming as fast as we can and the old lady dying. What do you suppose she wants to see us for? It can't be to say good-by. No one thinks he's dying until he's dead."

"Wants to see to whom to leave her money," returned Nel, peering, in her turn, into the hall. "She has forty millions, Ricky."

"Sounds good to me," said Ricky. "But what does she want to see us for? Is she going to leave it to the best-looking?"

"I hope not! I would hate to miss it."

"You're no homelier than the others," encouraged Ricky.

She pinched him and dropped Great-aunt Appleby to return to the fourth assistant gardener. "I think I'll speak to him. I have never talked to an anarchist."

"Aren't you coming in?" demanded the frightened Ricky.

"I'll be in directly. Here's the bell. I've pushed it for you."

"Oh, I say, Nel, wait a minute. She's your relative, not mine."

"I know, Ricky, but even then, she won't bite you," returned Nel cheerfully, turning away, as a door at the far end of the hall opened and a tall white-clad woman approached them.

"Nel," pleaded Ricky in a harsh whisper, but Nel had fled before the woman within had reached the door.

She unlatched the screen and held it open while young Crane entered, hat in hand. The woman was young and decidedly pretty, with great soft eyes and a small firm mouth above a squarely determined chin. She was tall, nearly as tall as Ricky himself, and while not fat, was most charmingly plump. She was clad in white

linen, a very plain, very severe, very becoming gown, with small white shoes just visible beneath the hem of the narrow skirt. It was clear at the first glance that she was no servant; probably one of the numerous relatives of Nel's eccentric Great-aunt Appleby, Ricky decided, as, left in the lurch by his wife, he bowed politely and murmured "Good afternoon." She smiled delightfully, revealing a row of small white teeth and a dimple in each smooth plump cheek, faintly flushed with the heat of the day.

"Come in," she said, her eyes leaving his and following Nel out into the sunshine which flooded the terrace beyond the protection of the gaily striped awning.

"She will be in directly," explained Ricky. "She wants to speak to the anarchist."

"Anarchist?" she questioned in a delightful throaty drawl.

"Our Jewish friend," said Ricky, and smiled down into the soft brown eyes.

The girl laughed. "He is one of the gardeners; may I ask who you are? I am Miss Varney, Miss Appleby's secretary."

Ricky held out his hand. "I am delighted," said he. "I am Ricky Crane."

Miss Varney drew a note-book, bound in Russian leather with a small pencil attached to it by a fine gold chain, from a very business-like, buttoned pocket just over her hip, and hastily ran through it, her delicate brows puckering before the intricacies of business.

"Oh, yes," said she, at last, her search rewarded, tapping her red lips with the bit of pencil and conning the page before her, "oh, yes, Mr. Ricardo Crane, first husband of Eleanor McVane Drake, daughter of Mrs. Alison Drake Fisher Parker, by her first husband, Amos Markham Drake."

"That is me," admitted Ricky. "Have you got us all down there?"

"Unto the third and fourth divorce," explained Miss Varney, closing the book and slipping it back into her pocket. "You see I had to have some kind of help. Miss Appleby gave me a list of her relatives and told me to write to them and see that they all came. But the list was several years old, and I found that all of your names had changed. So I got a *Who's*

Who and a social register and looked you all up and then made out this list for my own benefit."

"I see. But why the pencil?"

"I have to change the list so frequently. Just this morning I heard that Stephen Mayhew is married again and the last, or the late Mrs. Mayhew is now Mrs. Von Loben Sels."

"I see, the complexities of modern life," suggested Ricky.

Miss Varney opened her sweet lips to say something, then suddenly changed her mind, to the enraptured Ricky's disappointment, and turning, led the way down the hall to the wide stairs at the farther end. She stopped at their foot and tapped a Chinese gong that hung just above the heavily carved mahogany newel post, then she turned to Ricky who had followed her.

"Miss Appleby does not like electric bells," half in explanation, half for the sake of saying something to ease the unwonted embarrassment she felt in this young man's company, an embarrassment unusual and entirely unsecretarial.

"Yes," said Ricky gently, looking again into the depths of her pretty eyes. "What does she like?"

Miss Varney's glance grew cold, and Ricky stammered forth an apology. "You see for the last two years, ever since I have been married to Eleanor, I have heard constantly of this great-aunt but only of what she does not like, never of what she does."

Miss Varney softened in quick sympathy. "One can like so few things, that one grows to like nothing," said she, sagely if a trifle ambiguously, and with just the faintest sigh, barely audible in the big cool hall.

A short pause followed, during which Ricky strove to think of something brilliant to say but could not. Miss Varney was again the first to speak.

"You are the first arrivals," said she, and smiled at him once more with the distant hauteur of the paid secretary who scorned to forget herself and the position she holds in the family.

"Is—er—er—is she very far gone?" stam-

mered Ricky, dismayed by the girl's pretty dignity.

Miss Varney shook her head with a merry little laugh, which again made a friend and equal of Ricky. "No, indeed. She is generally in very good health for one so old. To-day she has had a slight attack of her 'trouble,' but it will pass. She has asked you all to visit her because she realizes that at her age anything is apt to happen and happen quite suddenly and she does not want to leave behind her any bitterness or misunderstanding. At the end of the week when she has met you all and made your acquaintance again, as it were, she will have made up her mind to whom she wishes to leave her money. On the last day she will announce whom she has decided to make her heir, and if any of the others feel that they have a grievance, they can tell her so and 'have it out.' She wants to leave nothing but peace behind and the feeling that she has done fairly by all."

"By jove," said Ricky. "I suppose the in-laws stand no show?"

"Oh, there will be enough for all," smiled

Miss Varney. "Miss Appleby is so fond of the factory and the old house that she is going to leave the bulk of the estate to one of you so that it may not be dissolved, but she has a great deal besides to distribute. She is very rich, you know."

"Vulgarly so," said Ricky, in the parlance of the times.

"Wealth is not vulgar," protested Miss Varney with the sweet reasonableness that had appealed to Ricky from the first as distinguishing her from the other self-supporting women he had met. "Not even the greatest. Wealth affords the very best means of becoming refined and gentle and cultured. We all want wealth. It is impossible that we all are so vulgar as to want that which is vulgar."

"By jove," said Ricky.

A stout elderly woman, with a gentle face showing gentle blood, dressed in heavy black silk, with rare old lace at neck and wrists, appeared at the bend in the wide stairs and came slowly down toward them.

"Mrs. Mainwaring," said Miss Varney, smiling up at the lady's approach, "this is Mr.

Crane. Mrs. Mainwaring is Miss Appleby's housekeeper."

"Howdy-do," said Ricky.

Miss Varney smiled and bowed, and turning, left Ricky dismayed less he be ushered at once and unprotected into the presence of the dead and dying in the care of the housekeeper.

CHAPTER II

NELLY AND THE SOCIALIST

"HOWDY-DO."

Nelly stood at the top of the steps and smiled down on the kneeling Reuben Rubenstein.

Reuben grunted. Instinctively he felt like touching his hat but restrained himself. He was as poor as she was rich, but it was no fault of his any more than it was worth of hers, and yet he felt a sneaking awe of her as of one from a different planet. She had power and he had none, and power is always awe-inspiring. Her daintiness, her exquisite raiment enwrapped her in a rarified atmosphere far above that of common mortals who worked for their bread and trusted to God for their clothes.

"Are you an anarchist?" she asked, descend-

ing a step and disclosing a glimpse of slim ankles and silk stockings above her low buckled shoes.

"I am a Socialist," said Reuben coldly, sitting back on his heals and pushing his hat from his heated brow.

"Oh!" Nelly was clearly disappointed. An anarchist with bombs and bowie knives would have been particularly pleasing at this time when she foresaw nothing but a week of boredom in her great-aunt's stately mansion. A Socialist was only a defeated politician as Ricky had once told her. She puckered her delicate brows and decided to return to the house, but the fourth assistant gardener had a pleasant boyish face, eager and bright, though his eyes were gloomy; besides, the sunshine on the marble steps was warm and sweet. So Nelly sat down on the lowest step and for the sake of talking began to talk to the fourth assistant gardener.

"A Socialist believes everybody owns everything, doesn't he?" said she.

"Ought to but don't," growled Reuben, surprised that she should talk to him and deter-

mined not to go back on his beliefs. "Who makes you folks rich, but us, huh?"

"Mama's alimony makes her rich," said Nelly, striving to be worthy of a political discussion and feeling a bit excited at this unexpected turn in the conversation. She had planned to question, not be questioned.

Reuben stared at her for a moment, brought to attention by the personal side of the problem. He glanced away nervously, and caught sight of the smoke of the button factory drifting above the roofs of the distant town which Miss Appleby's father had founded and from whence the Appleby millions had poured forth in as steady a stream as the buttons. He waved a grimy hand toward the smoke, feeling himself on firm ground once more.

"Who makes the buttons in those factories?" he demanded.

"The machinery," said Nelly, pleased with her ability to argue. If she had known political science was so easy, she would have taken an interest in woman's suffrage.

"Who makes the machinery go?" demanded Reuben, not to be turned aside.

"Electricity," said Nelly and beamed at him. "Or maybe," she added dubiously, "or maybe it is water. I have forgotten whether or not there is a stream through the town."

"There ain't," said Reuben shortly. "It's 'lectricity." He paused. There seemed nothing further to say. Nelly always put a period to every discussion. Reuben looked at the disabled lawn-mower a moment, picked up the monkey-wrench, and then turned again to the girl, who was watching him with expectant eyes, for as far as she was concerned the argument had just begun.

"Water, 'lectricity and machinery wouldn't be no good, if it wasn't for us folks who work," he explained patiently. "Those buttons make Miss Appleby's wealth, but we make the buttons. But do we get any of the wealth we make? I guess not."

"Doesn't great-aunt ever pay you?"

"We get wages, six dollars a week to begin with."

"Well then, that's all right." Nelly was relieved. "I thought maybe she never paid you. Once my second father forgot mama's ali-

mony and we couldn't pay the servants for two months. It was quite unfortunate—for mama. Did you ever work in the factory?"

"Yes. I hurt my hand in the machinery and was laid up. When it got so I could draw the insurance no more, my hand was still too weak to do the work in the factory I was doing and Miss Appleby took me on here as the fourth assistant gardener until my hand gets well again."

"That was kind in her—"

"Kind?" Reuben's dark face flamed angrily, filling Nelly with regret that he wasn't an anarchist. Such a burst of passion was wasted in a mere Socialist. "Kind? I hurt my hand, disabled myself making her rich and she sits up there in that big house, with servants to wait on her, with automobiles and carriages, and no worry and no work, and me, *me*, y'understand, who makes her wealth, who work so she can loaf, *me* she condescends to give five per and found to."

"I thought her father made her money," said Nelly, frankly surprised. "He had a little money and more nerve, my first father says,

and he used all the money to build the original small factory and all the nerve to borrow more money and sign notes and go out and get orders and compete with others who had been making buttons for years. This is what my first father says."

"He says wrong," snapped Reuben. "He may have put all his money into it, but he had money to put in; none of us have any money."

"He didn't have any either, when he was young," said Nelly. "He was like you, a gardener, but he had grit, my first father says, and sense enough to hold his tongue and work and save. My first father says no talking jackass ever yet made anything or got anywhere, except in a side-show as a freak."

Reuben discreetly dropped the subject of the great-grandfather who had grit and returned to the old one of the factory. "Every day, from eight in the morning until six at night, we work hard, turning out buttons—"

"They are beautiful buttons," cried Nelly, glad of the chance to praise this youth whose lean dark face appealed so strongly to her. "Great-aunt sends us all samples. See? I have

some on this frock." She showed him a score of huge buttons on her baggy coat.

Reuben glanced at the buttons and then upward at the pretty flushed face, the full red mouth and the rather weak chin. The girl's eyes were deep blue, her light hair was arranged fascinatingly around her ears and low on her forehead. Everything about her breathed daintiness, refinement, something foreign to the fourth assistant gardener. He noticed that she had only one dimple which came and went rapidly with every changing expression of her smiling face. Reuben forgot for the moment the subject of buttons and caught himself looking for the companion dimple in the other cheek.

"Mama says she is thankful of course for buttons, but she does wish it were real estate," continued Nelly, with a smile that revealed only one dimple.

"Yes," sneered Reuben, brought back to earth —and sneering to drown the sneaking subservience he felt, the ridiculous, humiliating elation in the secret heart of him that this dainty being, his employer's niece, was chatting with

him as though they were equals. But he was as good as she. Why should she not talk with him? "Yes, they're pretty buttons, but the dollars they bring in are prettier and we don't see none of them, we don't, though we make the buttons."

"Neither do we," said Nelly, missing the point of the argument in a charming and distracting sympathy. "I guess Great-aunt Appleby is the only one who does."

"And what right has she to them?" demanded Reuben, who had lost the thread of the discussion in a hopeless maze of irrelevancies.

"She owns them," explained Nelly sweetly, once more putting a period to the conversation.

"I can't make you see," returned Reuben gently. For once his eloquence, which had swayed his fellow workers more than once by it's rushing torrent, was silenced. "But it is unfair, you to have so much and we so little—"

"Oh, I think you have a lot," cried the girl who was thoroughly enjoying herself. This was what Maude always did, slum work, political things in the dark haunts of the Bowery among Italians and foreigners and poor

people, and Maude always looked down on her for not doing likewise.

"What have I got?" demanded Reuben, standing upright before her in his work-worn clothes, his small hat pushed on the back of his head, his finely cut, Jewish face flushed, his dark eyes looking down into hers, angrily, but withal amused, as at the prattle of a child. He was distinctly good to look at, the sheer physical grace compelling admiration whether or no.

"Oh," cried Nelly, "you have perfectly splendid good looks!"

There was another blank silence. The sun bathed them tenderly. The air was sweet with lilac fragrance and in a near-by chestnut tree, a small bird chirped shrilly. Reuben wondered vaguely if he were going mad. The mere fact that he, the fourth assistant gardener, and the wealthy Miss Appleby's grand-niece were conversing in apparent equality on the great lady's front stoop was cause enough in itself to make him question his sanity, let alone the erratic course the conversation had taken. Fourth assistant gardeners had never before attracted

as much attention from the family as the wistaria growing in cultured dignity over the portico. He looked down on the small flat hat, knocked "galley west" to his masculine eye, at the sweet flushed face beneath, at the dainty dress and the plumb gold mesh bag reposing on the narrow lap while the girl rested her chin in her hands and stared up at him. In spite of himself and his grim determination, he smiled, his lean face softening into an expression of gentleness entirely foreign to it. For a moment he did not know what to reply, then suddenly he broke forth, his wonder uppermost.

"What are you talking to me like this for?"

"Is—er—am I impudent?" She had not caught his meaning and her delicate face flushed a rosy red.

"No, but I am only the fourth assistant gardener. Why do you notice me even?"

"Oh!" She was relieved. The flush died from her cheeks and she nodded at him. "Maude does it, you know. Nowadays, it is all the thing."

"What is all the 'thing'?"

"Talking to the 'people,'" said she.

"Aren't you rich 'people'?"

"No, we are the oppressors."

"Not all of you," contradicted Reuben hastily, and then flushed at this base betrayal of his class. But the idea of this slim young thing, soft, childish, simple, being an "oppressor" was absurd. She nodded firmly.

"We all are, we the 'idle rich,'" she insisted. "Though how we can be 'idle' and yet 'oppressors' I don't see."

Reuben preferred to waive any further discussion of any kind, not that he disliked opposition in an argument. It indeed flamed the fire of his eloquence to white heat in ordinary cases, but this was no ordinary case. An argument with Nelly was as impossible as one with the Sphinx. In neither case, could one arrive at any conclusion, save possibly an insane asylum.

"Who's Maude?" he asked.

"My cousin. She always does this, lectures to immigrants and talks a lot with the 'downtrodden' and others who won't work. She is a feminist, you know."

"What are you?" asked Reuben, amused.

"I'm a female."

Reuben laughed, his gloomy eyes twinkling. "What's the difference?"

"The first are strong-minded. They talk a lot but don't mean much of it. Females are weak-minded, but mean the little they say. But do sit down. We can talk so much better."

"I have to work," sneered Reuben, once more sullen. "I belong to the working class."

"You said you belonged to the talking class," objected Nel.

"Talking class?" stammered Reuben, once more all at sea.

"Socialists, you know, and anarchists and I Won't Work people."

"Who are the I Won't Work people?" asked Reuben, feeling incapable of refuting anything she might say.

"The I. W. W."

"*They* work."

"No one ever hears of it."

"Well, they work," insisted Reuben. He glanced across the lawn to the distant gates where the whir of a motor heralded the approach of further oppressors. He frowned,

then, picking up the handle of the lawn-mower, turned again to the girl. "You do not understand. There is going to be a big meeting to-night in Maynard Square and there will be a lot of good speakers. Why don't you come and hear what they say? You can motor down and sit in the car all the time."

"I am afraid they would be mad because I have a car and they have none," demurred Nelly.

"Oh, we aren't mad for that reason," protested Reuben. "We aren't really mad. It's not that."

"Jealous?" suggested Nel.

"No, no."

"What then?"

Again Reuben waived argument. "Come and see," said he.

"Thank you, I will. I would like to. I have always wanted to be a feminist."

Reuben started to say something, thought better of it, and touching his hat, walked away as a second motor-car, a limousine, rolled smoothly up to the steps bringing more ins and in-laws.

CHAPTER III

FEMALES AND FEMINISTS

NELLY sat still in the sunshine and dreamily watched a motor-car approach and stop at the foot of the steps. Hardly had this limousine come to a standstill when a smart red runabout drew up behind it. The smaller car was driven by a young woman. A fat good-natured youth sat in the seat beside her and in the rumble behind was a chauffeur. The driver called gaily to Nelly and waved a gauntleted hand.

A round little woman of forty, looking thirty, alighted from the limousine and nodded pleasantly to Nel, then smiled as she glanced at the red car behind.

"Hullo, Maudie. Hullo, Tom."

"Hullo," answered the girl in a cool crisp young voice. "Got the youngsters with you?"

"Here they are," beamed the round little woman and turned to the limousine to help a

capped and aproned nurse assist three rosy children to alight.

"Have you been here long, Nelly?" she asked as she held the hand of a fat little toddler of three while he scrambled up the marble steps.

"About an hour," replied Nel, drawing the child to her and kissing the fat warm little cheek which he had promptly presented for the salute he saw coming. "Hullo, Toots—baby boy."

"I never allow any one to kiss him on the mouth," explained his mother, straightening his hat with unconscious pride. "Microbes, you know. I have taught all of them to turn their cheeks, as it says in the Bible."

The empty limousine disappeared around the house and the smart red runabout took its place, Maudie bringing the car to a stop with the skill of a professional. She drew off her gloves, still seated in the car. The chauffeur leaped down and the man beside her alighted and held out his hand to her. She waved the proffered help aside and stepped forth, speaking to the chauffeur.

"Bains, see what is the matter with the igni-

tion," she ordered in the short crisp tones of her commanding young voice, a bit curt, like an army captain addressing a private, absolutely impersonal, unsexual.

Tommy mounted the steps, leaving her issuing orders and sat down beside Nelly in the sunshine.

"Hullo, Nel. Where's Ricky?" he asked.

"In the house," said Nelly. "He's quite upset, because he's so afraid of sick people."

"By jove, I don't blame him. Why do you think the old girl wants to see us?"

"Auntie isn't really sick, is she?" asked round little Mrs. Von Loben Sels, lifting Toots up the last step to the terrace and glancing back at Nelly as she frankly panted for breath.

"Oh, I guess not," returned Nel.

"Why do you think she has asked us here?" queried Tommy again, used to having his questions go unanswered unless repeated. He pushed his hat back and watched his wife, bending over the open hood of the machine as she pointed out some fault to the trim young chauffeur.

"To pick out the best-looking one of us for

her heir," returned Nelly, as she held out her hand to the shy little girl the nurse was leading up the steps. "Isn't she pretty, Tommy?"

"She would certainly get the cash if it depended on looks," agreed Tommy.

The screen door behind them opened and Miss Varney, cool and white, came out into the shelter of the gaily striped awning.

"How do you do?" said she, and looked prettily from one to the other.

Mrs. Von Loben Sels sailed forward, her right hand out, the other firmly grasping Toots' fat little fist. "How do you do, my dear? I am Mrs. Von Loben Sels."

"I am Miss Varney, Miss Appleby's secretary," replied Miss Varney.

They shook hands and Miss Varney drew forth the red leather book with the pencil attached. "Excuse me," she begged, with a deprecating apology in her smiling eyes. "There are so many of you, I have put you all down here. Mrs. Von Loben Sels," she tapped her red lips and puckered her delicate brows as she quickly read her memorandum to herself:

"Mrs. Von Loben Sels, just divorced from Sydney Mayhew, one child, Sydney Mayhew, Junior."

"And this is little Sydney?" she asked aloud, slipping the book into her pocket and kneeling before the white-clad youngster. "Isn't he dear?"

"I think he resembles the Applebys," declared his mother. "Don't you, Miss Varney?"

"I do indeed," agreed Miss Varney, who was proficient in tact if nothing else.

The nurse with a child by each hand approached and Mrs. Von Loben Sels turned to them with all the pride of maternity.

"This," said she, drawing one of the little girls forward, "this is Lysbeth."

"Mayhew?" questioned Miss Varney, taking the hand the little girl so prettily extended for all her shyness.

Mrs. Von Loben Sels smiled. "No. She is Lysbeth Van Tassel. She is two years older than Sydney—we call him Toots. I was married before I married Mr. Mayhew."

"Oh, yes," said Miss Varney, turning to the

second little girl, a child hardly more than two years older than Lysbeth. "And what is your name, dear?"

"Helen," said the child, shaking hands with childish gravity.

"Helen Van Tassel," smiled Miss Varney. "What a pretty name."

"Helen McGath," explained Mrs. Von Loben Sels. "You see I was married before I married Mr. Van Tassel."

"Oh, yes," said Miss Varney, "yes, indeed, quite so. But little Sydney is Miss Appleby's grand-nephew, is that it?"

"Yes. I brought the girls along, because, though of course they are no relation whatever to auntie, I thought she would like to see them."

"She would indeed," agreed the ever tactful Miss Varney, wondering where she could put the two extra, unexpected little girls. She and Mrs. Mainwaring would have to have a consultation before she could show them to their rooms. "Won't you come in? You must all be so tired."

Maude, in the graceful, voluminous folds of

the latest thing in motor cloaks, strode manfully up the steps, across the terrace to the group, Tommy following her and Nelly languidly bringing up in the rear.

She was thinking of the young Jew, of his dark eyes and thin, eager, nervous face and contrasting him with the fat, good-natured well-dressed Tommy. Tommy was mostly clothes, but then he was clean, his voice was gentle and his manners faultless. One could talk to Tommy as to Ricky, with no need of explaining one's remarks, with no rasping of the nerves at impossible speeches. One could go to either in trouble and either would help to the best of his ability with the impersonal gallantry of his gentle blood. It was good to belong to such men, and yet the Jew was fascinating with the fascination of the uncultured brute which appeals to the brute in all of us. She wished he were an anarchist.

Miss Varney turned from Mrs. Von Loben Sels and the children to greet Maude.

"I am Miss Varney—" she began.

"Married?" asked Maude, grasping the extended hand in a cool firm grip like a business

man with only a few minutes for the empty formalities of life.

"Oh, no, *Miss* Varney," emphasizing the Miss and blushing delightfully. "I have had no luck." She smiled with her warm full lips and glanced merrily at Tommy.

"No luck," scoffed Maude. "The men have had no luck. Any woman can get any man she wants to. We, my dear, are the agents of choice for the betterment of the human race, not the men, as the old-fashioned idea was."

Miss Varney, unlike Reuben Rubenstein, never disputed any one. "Suppose the men are all so nice I couldn't choose?" she suggested.

"Shut your eyes and grab," advised Nelly.

"It amounts to the same thing in the end," laughed Mrs. Von Loben Sels, who was certainly well qualified to express an opinion on the subject.

"No, indeed," cried Maude sharply, laying down the law at once and promptly. "Not at all. Eugenics—"

"Eugene?" questioned Miss Varney, having misunderstood and reaching hastily for the red book. So far there were no Eugenes in it, but

if Maude were divorced— "Eugene? Er—er —may I ask the last name?"

"Eugenics, child," laughed Maude. "We women must be careful what man we choose for the father of our children."

"Thank you, my dear," said Tommy. "That night when you proposed—"

"Tommy, the idea! I did *not* propose. You did."

"All married men say the same thing, my dear," comforted Mrs. Von Loben Sels. "Don't let that fret you."

"He doesn't fret me," scoffed Maude. "Why shouldn't women propose?"

"Passive attraction," suggested Miss Varney, a bit timidly. One became timid as a rule when one attempted to converse with Maude.

"No such thing," growled Tommy in a low aside which his wife unfortunately overheard. "Not in the female line," he added with the despair of desperation as Maude had heard his first remark. "We are the pursued, Miss Varney. You females are the pursuers."

"Females are, but not feminists," declared Maude.

"Are they the pursued?" asked Tommy meekly.

"Not at all. We are neither pursued nor pursuer. That old conception of the relation of the sexes is ridiculous. When we meet the perfect man, we simply marry him."

"Suppose we shouldn't happen to be a perfect woman?" suggested Nelly.

"My dear, all women are perfect," said Tommy and bowed gallantly to the four pretty ones before him.

"Miss Varney," said Maude, proceeding with her belated introduction, "I am Miss Brown."

"Miss Brown," stammered Miss Varney. "I—I—thought—er—"

"That I was Mrs. Thomas Lane," smiled Miss Brown. "No. That is old-fashioned. Why should we women take our husbands' names?"

"Why indeed," agreed Miss Varney, not daring to say anything else.

"A most foolish thing to do," said Mrs. Von Loben Sels, "if we are ashamed of them. But then why take them?"

Maude flushed. "Not at all. Shame has

nothing to do with it. But why, what reason is there in me calling myself Mrs. Lane any more than there would be in Tommy calling himself Mr. Brown?"

"For the sake of the children," explained Mrs. Von Loben Sels, with a wise nod of her pretty head. "If you don't tag each one with his father's tag, you'll get them mixed up, my dear, and won't be sure, if one should come in for a little money on the paternal side, to whom it goes."

Maude waved aside the obvious in the example of the three children gazing at her solemnly from the shelter of the nurse's skirts and returned to her theory. "That's absurd, Lilla. Have women so little personality that they haven't even a permanent name they can call their own? Must I sink myself so completely in my husband that I take his name? Why should I not take his personality too then, his little characteristics and mannerisms? I am an individual as well as Tommy—"

"I know, Maude," interrupted Nel, who was fired to argue by her recent experience with the

fourth assistant gardener, "but you have no right to the name of Brown. That was your father's name—"

"Why, certainly," agreed Maude, turning to Nel, cool and erect, her head thrown up, shoulders back, hands in the pockets of her great coat, feet firmly planted, "why, certainly—"

"But your mother shouldn't have taken his name," explained Nel.

Maude stared a moment, faintly puzzled by the new outlook. "Mother was a Miss Appleby before she married," said she, slowly, a vague gleam coming into her eyes.

"Then you are Miss Appleby," laughed Mrs. Von Loben Sels.

"No," said Nelly, gently, firmly, unsparingly. "Her mother wasn't a Miss Appleby. That was her grandfather's name and her grandmother shouldn't have taken his name. What was your grandmother's name, Maude?"

"Peter," stammered Maude, her superb self-assurance on the verge of tottering to its ruin. "Miss Peter."

"But that was her father's name, so she had no right to it," pressed Nel, determined by a

force stronger than herself to get this thing straightened out. "What was your grandmother's mother's name?"

"I do not know," confessed Maude, the color leaping into her beautiful cool cheeks, her eyes filling with tears. "We were never able to trace that branch back any further."

"Then—" began Nelly, half fearful at the havoc she had wrought but inspired to press the subject to the end.

"Come," interrupted Tommy, with sudden unexpected boldness, seizing his wife's arm and leading her firmly but gently away.

CHAPTER IV

VERA MEETS HER FATHER

BEFORE evening, nearly the entire clan of Appleby, married, divorced, remarried, old maids and elderly lads, children by steps, by stages, by series, had arrived. Miss Varney was prostrate and Appleby House was full from cellar to attic, while some of the masculine members flowed over into the manager's lodge and slept in the billiard room. Miss Appleby herself did not appear and Miss Varney explained in her fluttering little way, the red leather book and cabled pencil all aquiver in her trembling hands, that her mistress had never dreamed how the family had—er—grown and had only provided for the ones she—er—er—not remembered—er—but —er—er—knew of, as one might say.

"My aunt is old-fashioned," said Henry Appleby, the latest arrival, kindly helping her out, his mild gray eyes resting quietly on her

pretty flushed face. "She believes that one should take the marriage vows seriously."

"Yes," smiled Miss Varney, "She did not take into consideration the divorces—"

"If we can't get divorced," said Freddy Van Tuyl gaily, "why get married?"'

"Don't," advised Appleby. "Divorce is man's one hope of salvation and a future life."

Vera Van Fleet laughed before she could check herself. All her life, she had scorned and unconsciously despised her father whom she did not know and had not seen since she was a child of eight. When she had received her great-aunt's invitation to spend a week at Appleby House and be looked over as a possible heir, she had half determined not to accept for fear she would meet her father. But her mother had urged her to go and had promised to come herself. So Vera had postponed a contemplated trip to Reno, and all aquiver with loyalty to her mother, all cold anger toward her father, had come to her great-aunt's. She had arrived that afternoon, before her father, and was holding court on the side porch to her own delectation, the amusement of the men clustered

around her and the angry disgust of the other women, females and feminists, suffragists and antis.

Vera was tall and thin with a slouch that was all the rage and gave the impression at first glance that she was going to break in two in the middle and fall in a mussy heap to the floor. Her dress was a sloppy affair of soft silk, apparently thrown on in the dark by a blind person having a spasm in the midst of a hurricane. Her hat, slapped up on one side and knocked flat on top, with a bunch of trimming protruding from under the brim as though flung on by a poor shot at a distance of fifty paces, tottered on the brink of sliding down upon her nose. Her mouth was whimsical and soft, with the curves of girlhood still apparent; her dark eyes laughed in frank good fellowship behind the drooping lashes of the born coquette, for Vera was a coquette from her high heels to her lop-sided hat. She had that indefinable charm of personality which is irresistible. It can not be defined. It is as elusive as the air, as unexplainable as life, as lasting as our span of years. Those who have

it not can never acquire it no matter how hard they try. Taking Vera feature by feature, she could not claim more than prettiness, but for all that, she was charming, alluring, irresistible. She knew her own charms and took a properly concealed pleasure in them. She pitied other girls, more beautiful, but far less popular than she and sometimes she showed it, and sometimes she pretended she didn't. She could drive a man to drink with her flippancy and to suicide with her gentleness.

The side veranda was delightfully cool. It overlooked the flower garden and the lawn, sloping down to the white smooth curve of the granite wall and the distant street. Vera glanced over the green sward beneath the shade of the great trees and yawned quite frankly before her attendant swains.

"Oh, yum," said she, "what wouldn't you give to be a child again?" and she nodded toward two horrified youngsters crouched in fright and wonder above a half dead toad on the driveway below the veranda.

She spoke to no one in particular, and Maude, who had been hanging on the ragged edge of

the conversation by a running scatter of half-veiled innuendoes, answered.

"Some people are always childish," said she, just a trifle too sharply.

Vera turned and looked at her out of coldly condescending eyes. "They are," she agreed sweetly. "Quite petty all the time. They can never seem to learn to conceal their feelings."

That did for Maude. She felt Freddy's eyes fixed on her in dislike and she flushed deeply and pretended to yawn, too, before she strolled carelessly away.

"Such a cat," said she to Mrs. Von Loben Sels whom she came upon in the wide hall, just dressed for dinner and pausing for a last glance at herself in the last mirror in the hall.

"Who?" asked Mrs. Von Loben Sels, not turning from the glass, but nodding to Maude's reflection in it.

"Vera," said Maude. "She has all the men dangling after her and gets mad if another woman speaks to one of them."

"She's daft about men," agreed Mrs. Von Loben Sels, putting her head on one side to

catch the effect of her new coiffure in that position.

"I know she is and for a married woman—"

"Piff, Maude, marriage doesn't count any longer," laughed Lilla gaily. "Eena, meena, mina moe, catch a nigger by the toe, when he hollers let him go, eena meena, mina, moe; that's as binding as the marriage ceremony, my dear."

"I know, and I am not a prude, but I must say that Vera Van Fleet carries things to the extremes. Where is her husband? Why hasn't he come with her?"

Mrs. Von Loben Sels turned from the mirror and gathered up her long silk draperies. "Husbands," said she, "are out of date. I haven't seen one for years, except at the altar for a few moments."

"Then what right have women to marry?" demanded Maude, who had been made primitive again by Vera's snub.

"To show forlorn spinsters that we can if we want to," laughed Mrs. Von Loben Sels. "An unmarried woman's value is always question-

able, like an unsold bolt of goods that has been on the shelf for years."

"Men," sneered Maude, once more the suffragette.

"I know, child," soothed Mrs. Von Loben Sels, "but sneer as we may, men are the joy of existence."

She nodded with gay philosophy and strolled out.

Vera on the side veranda yawned again. "Will suffrage prevent us females from being cats to one another, I wonder?" she questioned, glancing from one man to the other.

"It will make you all cats," growled Freddy Van Tuyl. "A government by women is mushy sentimentality."

"Fie, fie." Vera shook the pancake with dough slopping over one side which she called a hat, at him. "In loyalty to my sex, I can not agree with you."

"In loyalty to your conscience?" suggested Van Tuyl.

"In loyalty to my conscience," laughed Vera, "we will drop the subject."

It was then that Appleby had arrived, a tall

elderly man, suit-case in hand. He saw the animated group by the railing and hesitated a moment before entering the house. Tommy saw him at the same moment and called to him.

"Hullo, Appleby. Come and discuss suffrage with Vera. She says in loyalty to her sex, she must defend it."

As her father approached, Vera glanced at him curiously, startled by the sudden meeting, though she had known that he would come and was on the lookout for him. A flush crept into her thin cheeks and after the first hasty glance, she looked quickly away, her pretty mouth serious, her eyes veiled. Appleby was tall and thin, a masculine replica of herself and she recognized the father she had not seen for years, the father she had been taught unconsciously to despise, the father her mother had divorced fourteen years ago for the sake of "the children," Vera and Charlie. Her head swam as in a daze and her hands grew suddenly cold while that tingling flush still burned in her face. She bowed amicably, but did not hold out her hand.

"I am not quite sure," said she, "whether my

conscience is female or feminist." She raised her head and looked coldly into Appleby's face, though her warm mouth smiled sweetly.

Her father's eyes met hers, full and straight, and she had an odd sensation of sinking into fathomless depths of tenderness. His eyes, like hers, were dark and merry and expressive. She felt a choking in her throat, a wild desire to lay her hands on his shoulders and kiss his thin wrinkled cheeks and call him "Dad." Something seemed to snap in her brain and for the first time in her life she questioned the justice of her mother's divorce. Then her fierce loyalty came to her rescue and she put the thought aside angrily. This man had no right to her slightest tenderness. She looked away, flushed and confused.

"I object to any woman having a conscience," declared Appleby in Vera's own voice, only deeper, as he smiled down at the lop-sided hat.

Vera laughed in spite of herself, recognizing her own whimsical foolishness, which her mother had never been able to understand.

"What should we have?" she questioned, forgetting for the moment that she disliked him.

"Nothing above the heart, but a pretty face," said Appleby. The men laughed agreement.

"An idle brain is the devil's workshop," quoted Vera with a grave shake of the head.

Appleby agreed. "But you see, I don't want them to have brains," said he.

"Women's brains are men's consciences," returned Vera, vastly amused.

"Are men's troubles," contradicted Appleby.

"If men had no troubles, they would become weak," declared Vera, glancing at her father's long thin face, with the deep-set merry eyes, the wide brow of the scholar and the mouth so like her own, humorous, but vacillating. Her mother had always said that he was weak, a kindly good-natured man, but weak, and his mouth confirmed her judgment.

Miss Varney had appeared just then with her pretty apologies for Miss Appleby's absence and the overcrowded condition of the house. She led Appleby away and Vera slipped up to her own room to try to quiet the tumult that seemed to be ringing in her head, before she dressed for dinner.

Alone, she tried to think clearly, but found

that she could not. She saw her father's face, old and thin and gray, and so amusingly like her own, and she struggled bravely in loyalty to her mother against the rush of tenderness that seemed engulfing her. She told herself sternly that it was absurd she should love this man whom she had been taught to scorn, but the telling did no good. She loved him, she was his, bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh, and knowing him weak, yet she loved him. It was silly to love so suddenly. She frowned at the floor and thought of her mother and of what this man had made her suffer, and yet she loved him. He was hers, but more blessed still, she was his, his as she would never be any other man's, though she married a thousand times, his in a relationship pure and sweet and unbreakable. There was not a law in the land that could make her not his child.

"He is weak," she thought, "and I am weak or I wouldn't care for him so on seeing him for the first time after all these years when I have positively hated him and didn't know a thing about him. Maybe it's because I hated him without knowing him that I change so now I

have seen him. I don't know. But oh, dad, I'm your daughter all right."

She was not quite sure that he recognized in the tall young matron the long-legged skinny child of eight as he had last seen her. He had said nothing to indicate that he knew her and yet he must. There was not another Vera in the family and he would know her by that though her last name was strange to him. But even if he was ignorant it would not be long, however, before he knew their relationship, and Vera decided, that in loyalty to her mother she must avoid him as much as possible. To strengthen the fast disappearing partiality for one parent, she reiterated over and over her old childish scorn for the other, reminding herself of his weaknesses and trying to forget his fatherhood.

CHAPTER V

AND LEARNS A THING OR TWO

DINNER, when Miss Varney had explained that Miss Appleby would not be down that evening and had offered the old lady's apologies, was a jovial meal. A spirit of hilarious curiosity to know one's kinfolks pervaded all. Vera tried to slip down-stairs and to her place at the table without meeting her father alone, but at the foot of the stairs, she found him standing in the faint light from the stained glass window, evidently waiting for her.

"Hullo, Vera," said he.

Vera flushed crimson and turned instinctively to escape, but she slipped, sprawling on the stairs in true feminine awkwardness as she clutched at her skimpy skirts with one hand and reached wildly for her father's aid with the other. He drew her to her feet and she raised agitated hands to her hair, blushing and smiling.

"So you knew me," said she, looking up at him as he stood watching her in masculine amusement that always irritated her in Sammy, as lowering to her self-respect, a barbarous relic of the past when women were men's playthings, but now pleased her in this man of her own blood. She would, indeed, have been ashamed of him if he had not considered himself in a way superior to her, a mere woman. She wanted him to be superior. It afforded her a chance of delightful relaxation in which she could be her own charming, whimsical, truly feminine self, hopelessly contradictory and illogical. She had felt it incumbent upon her to be Sammy's equal, if not superior, and superiority is a terrible strain to maintain.

"So you knew me," said she, and dismissed any loyalty to her mother in the overpowering curiosity to know her own father and what manner of man he was.

"Certainly, I knew you," said he gravely. "It is a wise father who knows his own child, nowadays. Come in to dinner. We can talk afterward."

He led her to the table and seated her, and

when he took the chair beside her she was glad, though for the moment disgusted with herself because she was glad. Before the meal ended she was aware that she was not the only one filled with curiosity. She often felt him watching her in an odd sort of way as though of appraisal, of ownership; a way in which no man had ever regarded her before, not even Sammy, for Sammy was the last person to admit he owned his wife, the first to acknowledge quite frankly that she owned him, soul, name, liberty and pocketbook.

When dinner was over, Appleby boldly took possession of her and led her out into the lilac scented night. He drew her into a corner of the porch where they could talk undisturbed and settled her comfortably among the pillows of the hammock, while she in guilty pleasure surrendered herself and let her loyalty to her mother go in whimsical acknowledgment of her weakness. Appleby sat down beside her and drew out his pipe.

"Do you mind?" he asked, hesitating before putting it into his mouth and looking at her in kindly scrutiny.

"No," said Vera. "I smoke myself when I feel devilish and must do something silly. You know I have no baby to spank."

Appleby laughed. "Why not have a baby?" he suggested.

"Horrors, no," exclaimed Vera. "What would I do with one?"

"Bring it up," said Appleby.

"It would probably die first, and I'm sure I should."

"Who is your husband, Vera?" asked Appleby.

Vera looked at him in sudden tenderness. It was a bit pathetic that he had to ask such questions of his own child. There was no sense in it. Vera wondered angrily how he could have possibly been detrimental to the well-being of either her brother or herself. He looked so old and faded and alone with his thinning hair and the heavy lines under his eyes; a gentle harmless creature.

"I have married a poor, downtrodden man," she replied in a sudden burst of disgust for herself and her mother. "But don't, for heaven's sake, tell him I said so."

"No," promised Appleby, "I won't. What is his name?"

"Sammy Van Fleet," said Vera.

"Where is he?" asked Appleby gravely, his eyes on her pretty face.

"Home," said Vera lightly. She glanced at her father and then looked quickly away again, her eyes falling beneath his gaze, suddenly abashed. Truly, she was his child. She felt hopelessly young, and silly and light, and for the first time in her life, in the wrong, in doubt as to her own character. She plunged into a wild explanation that explained nothing. "You see, I had to have a rest, my nerves—"

Appleby pulled slowly at his pipe, took it from his mouth and exhaled a great cloud of smoke. "Women's nerves, child, are generally simple selfishness."

Vera blushed angrily and threw up her head. "How dare you—"

"Tush, Vera," said he, frankly unimpressed, looking down at her as a Newfoundland at a snapping poodle, in amused tolerance. Vera felt more hopelessly silly and childish than ever, but still struggled to defend herself.

"You do not realize," said she coldly, "how my time is occupied. I am straining every nerve in the cause of suffrage."

Appleby roared. "Marching?" he asked quizzically.

"Miles," admitted Vera, and laughed in spite of herself. "You are thoroughly nasty, father," said she, and edged up to him with a new feeling of delightful companionship, of the enfolding protection of a person strong in a way where she was weak.

"How's mother and Charlie?" asked Appleby. "I am ashamed not to have kept better track of all of you."

"Have you no excuse?" asked Vera gravely, in her turn.

"No," replied Appleby. "I should have done so."

Vera shook her head sternly. "You should have an excuse," said she. "We women always have an excuse for everything we do. You never got an apology from a woman yet without an exonerating excuse attached to it, so it was really impossible to blame her in the first place."

"We have much to learn," said Appleby.

"You have indeed," agreed Vera. "Mother is well. She married again. She felt it her duty to do so," the girl cried hotly, suddenly furious with herself that she should feel compelled to defend her mother before this man.

Appleby nodded. "She was great on duty."

"And you weren't great enough," blazed Vera.

"Quite right," said Appleby. "Your mother is a charming woman. Whom did she marry and are there any youngsters?"

"Two, Marjory and Kenneth, cunning youngsters, but little demons. Don't talk to me about angel children. Children were born in sin and it takes the wrong side of a brush, vigorously applied, to take it out of them."

Appleby laughed. "Your mother never spanked you. Reason—"

"If I had a child, I would reason with it by the aid of a forcibly applied shingle," declared Vera. "The things I regret most in my life are the half dozen good hard spankings I should have received and didn't."

They chatted until the stars came out one by

one and the ever-careful Mrs. Mainwaring began to see that the lights below stairs were extinguished and the doors locked. Then they stole softly in, crept up-stairs, and whispered a last good night to the housekeeper who passed them in the hall. At Vera's door, Appleby drew his daughter to him and kissed her tenderly.

"Good night, dear," said he. "Sleep well."

For one moment Vera leaned against him, with a bitter half formed regret for the years that she had not known him. Then she kissed him, in an odd mixture of childish humility and womanly dignity.

"Good night, dad," she whispered, repeating the playroom formula of the long ago. "Happy dreams, sweet dreams, sleep tight."

CHAPTER VI

THE FOURTH ASSISTANT GARDENER

THE automobile drew up at the edge of the crowd and Nelly instinctively moved closer to her husband whom she had persuaded to take her to the meeting to which Reuben had invited her.

"Aren't we a bit too near?" she whispered, not to be overheard by any of those standing on the curb and frankly staring at the great red car. "If they get to throwing bombs—"

"They will throw them straight at us," declared Ricky cheerfully. "Shall we go?" already bored.

Nelly glanced at the dark crowd, pressing up to the speaker, who, standing on a barrel at the farther side of the walk, was clearly seen against the bright drug-store window behind him. The street lamp threw a faint wavering light over those in its immediate vicinity, leaving the rest of the gathering in more complete

obscurity. It was a large crowd, overflowing across the public square, a shabby crowd, with dark, sullen, foreign faces, thick lips, low foreheads, and small shifting eyes—Jews, Hungarians, Poles, Slavs. Those nearest the car were chattering in shrill unknown tongues, gesticulating frantically with every word. Some were smoking, some laughing, some nodding drowsily, half asleep. There was no policeman in sight and Nelly shuddered. Ricky beside her and the young chauffeur on the front seat were the only clean-cut, law-abiding, American faces she could see.

"Maybe we had better go," whispered Nelly.

But just then the speaker, accompanied by a burst of manufactured applause from those gathered closest about him, stepped down, and young Reuben Rubenstein leaped to his place. He began to talk and the chatting around them died, those smoking threw aside their cigarettes and pressed nearer, the drowsy awoke and only a low murmur of assent now and then swept the silent crowd. Where the first speaker had failed completely, Reuben had the crowd with him in a moment. He was talking from his

heart and he talked well, with fire and eloquence; the words poured from his mouth and swept the crowd along. Even Ricky straightened up and forgot to be bored, even the young chauffeur nodded agreement now and then. In five minutes, Reuben had his audience swaying to his will. It pressed closer around him, sullen, morose, muttering, now and again bursting into spontaneous cheers. Nelly forgot her desire to go home. She leaned eagerly forward, her small face tense and earnest, her lips parted, her eyes bright. Tall, slim, graceful, Reuben threw back his handsome head and poured forth his denunciation of the rich.

"We are God's children," he cried after a moment's eloquent pause. "We," he cried, and Nelly half rose from her seat.

"Then why ain't yer satisfied?" demanded a shrill Yankee voice from the obscurity of the edge of the crowd.

All turned whence the voice came and for a moment the speaker seemed baffled. Ricky chuckled and sought to pierce the gloom to see the questioner. He thought he recognized the voice of Miss Appleby's head gardener.

"Satisfied," cried Reuben, and the beauty of his deep voice again caught the attention of the crowd, "satisfied to be slaves, while our masters, the devil's spawn, ride around in their death-dealing wagons, trampling us beneath their wheels?"

"Yes, yes," cried half a dozen shrill voices, while dull mutterings could be heard, rumbling like the first warning thunder-claps of an approaching storm.

"Ain't God's favor worth a motor-car?" demanded the same high voice that had interrupted before.

Again all turned to see whence came the interruption.

"Yes," cried Reuben, fearing the crowd was getting away from him, "yes, it is and we shall do nothing to forfeit His favor, but we must fight for our rights and with Him behind us, we will win—"

"Win what?" demanded the unseen from the edge of the crowd. "Money, and lose God's favor?"

"Win justice," cried Reuben, becoming exasperated. His lean face flushed angrily and

he stepped to the edge of the improvised stand and sought to see to whom he was now directly speaking. "Justice, that's all we want, the chance to be men, not slaves, to have wives and children, a home of our own and peace. We do the work but who gets the money? Last year, I could make twenty-five dollars a week, this year, I can't possibly make more than sixteen, work as hard as I can—"

"How much did yer get in the old country?" demanded the unseen questioner.

"Kick him out, kick him out," yelled those nearest the barrel-stand. Whereupon the crowd turned and surged angrily into the street.

"Get us out of this," cried Ricky to the chauffeur. "Back, man, quick."

The chauffeur threw on the power even as Ricky spoke, and with a dull thud of the engines, the car began to puff and snort, backing slowly that they might not run over any one.

"Don't want to squash one," explained the boy at the wheel, glancing fearfully behind where the crowd eddied and whirled. "They'd skin us then, sure."

The noise of the engines drew Reuben's at-

tention as he raised his voice in a last desperate attempt to hold the crowd. By the light of the street lamp, he recognized Nelly in the tonneau of the car. She was half standing, one hand resting on Ricky's shoulder, her small head up, her face white, but scornful of fear. In her brave little heart was the indomitable courage of her grandsire who fell at Bunker Hill. Reuben's eyes brightened, his face softened and he smiled in spite of himself. She had come though he had not dared to hope, had not thought that she would so condescend. Across the tumble of dark forms between them, their eyes met. Reuben leaped from the barrel and Nelly's heart thrilled to watch him working his way through the crowd toward them, as a master through a pack of hounds.

"Go slow, go slow," cautioned Ricky, watching behind them. "Steady till we get free."

The car backed slowly, inch by inch. Now and then, a man was slightly brushed and he would turn to curse the car and the liveried chauffeur, or to glare at the two in the tonneau with their gentle, high-bred young faces.

"Hold on," cried Ricky, but too late.

The back wheel hit a man in the tangled swaying mass and threw him to the street. Even as the dull impact told him that he had hit something, the chauffeur threw in the forward gear and the car leaped ahead, then stood still. But the crowd had seen. With a roar it turned from pursuit of the man who had aroused its displeasure and leaped at this new enemy. Ricky leaped to his feet and forced Nelly down, standing between her and the stones which began to fly. The chauffeur yanked the wheel around as far as he could and threw in the clutch in a desperate but unsuccessful attempt to turn the car, jammed as it was with the front wheel pressed against the curb. With a yell, the crowd rushed at them, but Reuben had made his way to them, and leaping on the running board, turned angrily on the rabble.

"Stand back," he cried, striking the forward man full in the face with his clenched fist, "stand back, I say. These people are friends."

By the lights of the car, the crowd recognized their leader and fell back, the man he had struck wiping his bleeding nose.

"Get out of the way, behind there," ordered Reuben, master now. "Don't yer see he has to back. Take that mutt there on the ground away."

Obediently the crowd fell back, dragging with them the man whom the car had struck and who had refused to rise, being too drunk to do so with dignity and disliking to forsake his part as victim.

The car backed slowly, the front wheel bumped down into the street and the car straightened. Nelly, white-faced, trembling now that the danger was over, sat in the seat where Ricky had thrust her, and raised eloquent eyes to their rescuer. Ricky opened the tonneau door.

"Come in," he said, holding out his hand in boyish gratitude. "You're all right, by jove."

Reuben grasped the hand before he realized that it was that of an enemy. "Aw, that's all right," he said, blushing and stammering. He was pitifully young. He didn't want rights, or justice, or God's favor. He wanted a big car, Ricky's clothes and good manners and pleasant ways.

"Get in," urged Ricky.

"Naw," returned Reuben, overcome with boyish embarrassment, "I've got to go back."

He swung off and waved his hand as the car quickened its speed into the night. He stood a moment staring after it, seeing a girl, crouched on the wide leather seat, gazing up at him in speechless gratitude, trying bravely to keep her white lips from trembling.

Vera was undressing in the room the two cousins had been forced by the unexpected size of the family to occupy together, as Nelly, thoroughly crushed, stole softly in. She looked at her young cousin but forbore to question, until the maid had put out the lights and left them.

"What's the trouble, Nel?" she asked kindly, turning slightly toward the other. "You look so white."

"Anarchists," returned Nelly, still subdued. "They get so mad because we have a car and they have none."

"Anarchists?" Vera strove to gather her sleepy wits together. "Do you mean Great-

aunt Appleby? I don't believe she has a motor-car, but I guess she could afford one—"

"Poor people," explained Nelly. "They are happy enough until they get to thinking how much more we have than they have, then they get mad."

"Jealousy," yawned Vera. "'Thou shalt not covet.' Moses should have known that commandment could never be kept."

"I know it," said Nelly, very wide-awake, thinking of the tall dark-eyed Reuben as he fought his way toward them through the crowd. "But they say it's not jealousy."

"We are all of us jealous, anyway," said Vera sleepily. "Good night, dear."

"Good night," answered Nelly. "But, Vera, really, he says it is not jealousy."

Vera was soon breathing heavily in deep sleep, but Nelly lay awake, wide-eyed, staring at the dim outline of the open windows, listening to the frogs in the swamp below the meadows, and to the distant rumble of incoming and outgoing trains. Over and over, she lived again that evening, the dark swaying mob, the angry shouts, the flying stones, and Reuben,

head bare, handsome face white and anxious for her, fighting his way through the crowd. She had no thoughts for Ricky. If love were to come into her life now that she was married, it was no fault of hers. All she could do under the circumstances was to get unmarried. That was easily done. Every one did it. She had married Ricky with the comforting thought that if she found she did not love him, she could divorce him and there would be no harm done. So she lay and dreamed with open eyes, light of heart and easy of conscience, dreamed of Reuben Rubenstein, the fourth assistant gardener, leader of men, champion of the oppressed and the downtrodden.

CHAPTER VII

THE LUNCHEON

VERA'S husband, Sammy Van Fleet, was a much dazed man. As he explained to his chum, he didn't know whether he was double or single. He had married what he had supposed was a woman, but had found to his dismay, after the wedding, that she was instead an individual. What she considered him, he didn't know, except that it certainly was not an individual. There is not room enough for two individuals in one house. From the whirl and confusion of two years of strenuous married existence, he emerged with no clear idea on any subject save that he was married and Vera was not. The few weeks during which she condescended to live under his roof, were so fraught with unintended offenses on his part against her individuality that he was thoroughly nervous and upset and he would breathe a sigh of relief when he saw the last of her as

he dashed to the station with her, her maid, her dogs, her golf and other bags, her suffrage literature and her individuality. He would return to the apartment, worn-out, confused, to find its emptiness and its quiet like a foretaste of the heavenly home. Lately, Vera had talked vaguely of freedom, of a wider field for her soul's expansion, unshackled by the clinging clasp of masculine hands. When she left him to go to Appleby House he saw her off in his usual automatic insensibility and returned home pondering the possibility of seeing her off for good.

Timidly, he glimpsed the faint far-away joy there might be in it, and guiltily considered how he might help her obtain that broader freedom she craved. He put the thought from him instantly as being disloyal to something, he did not know what, but certainly not to Vera. It kept recurring, however, with ever growing boldness as the long quiet days passed and finally he wrote to Vera in fear and vagueness on the subject.

"My dear Vera," he wrote. "When you were here last, you said something about Reno. If

you wish to go, don't let me stand in your way. You know my love for you desires only your happiness. Lovingly yours, Sam."

It was a pathetic note, but then Sam was pathetic. Vera received it the day after she met her father. It surprised and touched her. Poor old Sammy, he too realized the importance of her happiness. It was pitiful to leave him, and yet even he understood that he must be sacrificed when it was a question of her individuality. The possibility of her foregoing happiness, never entered Vera's head. She was intensely sorry for Sammy that he should be deprived of her flitting and erratic presence, but so it must be. She felt somehow that the occasion called for a bit of mourning, a short withdrawal from the frivolities of life.

Gently, she tucked the letter away in the bosom of her dress, and as Miss Appleby had again sent word down that she was too ill to meet her guests that morning, Vera slipped out across the lawn to the prim orchard, all a riot of bloom now, to commune a while with her soul and dedicate a few passing thoughts of tenderness to the crushed and broken Sammy. It was

very warm and sultry, and Vera found after a few moments, that her own society palled on her terribly. Her individuality could not expand without a spectator, some one to listen to the expanding and be impressed by it, some humble creature who would let her talk, and talking, expand. All nature at the lovely springtime of the year lay before her, and she found herself frankly bored. She glanced idly over the low wall at the end of the orchard and saw her father in the shade of a tree's branches which leaned over the wall. He was sitting reading and smoking, a silk handkerchief tucked in his collar and hanging down in front like a baby's bib. His hat was off, and Vera smiled and her eyes softened as she noticed how bald he was. Conscious that he was no longer alone, he looked up quickly and saw her.

His face brightened at the sight of her, peeping at him from beneath the brim of her fascinating little hat, all laces and flowing ribbons. Vera smiled spontaneously and felt the vague burden of Sammy and her soul's expansion recede into the nebulous calm of a father's protection. He arose and helped her over the

wall, and she sank into the deep grass beside him with a contented sigh and a half formed fear of bugs.

"Looking for something?" asked Appleby as she glanced from side to side.

"Bugs," said she.

"Looking for trouble, the way your sex always does," laughed Appleby. "Wait until the bugs and the troubles come."

"I am in trouble," said Vera, knitting her brows. "I hate to hurt Sammy, but—"

"Why hurt him?"

"I find that we are not congenial," with a prim sigh.

"Doesn't let you have your way in everything, eh?" suggested Appleby, glancing at her, amused and quizzical.

"Not at all," cried Vera hotly. "We find we have made a mistake." It was a great concession on Vera's part to make it plural.

"Been looking for it, I'll bet," said Appleby, "as you were looking for bugs."

"Yes," admitted Vera before she realized what she was saying. "Dad, I swear if you were not my father, a flesh and blood relative

and so privileged to be insulting, I'd divorce you for saying such things to me. As it is—"

"As it is?" urged Appleby.

"I forgive you." Vera beamed at him, glad to have a man who would say what he wanted to say to her. "Sammy wants to get rid of me. See, here is his letter."

"Why did you marry him?" asked Appleby, reading the note and handing it back, peering at her gravely, as he had a way of doing, interested in knowing this young female part of him.

"I thought I loved him," explained Vera. "I did like him, tremendously, and I kept wondering if it were not love. I thought it was, I did, truly. And then I always felt that if I made a mistake and it wasn't love, I could divorce him."

Appleby nodded.

"How could I tell?" demanded Vera, her conscience hurt by his silence. "I was a young girl, inexperienced. How could I tell whether it was love or not? How could I possibly know whether he was the right man?"

"It is a shame," agreed Appleby. "There

should be a commission authorized by Congress to investigate such things and assure us all marital happiness. Think of being forced to marry without knowing whether twenty years hence we will be as happy as on the wedding day. There should be a law forbidding young girls from undergoing such a risk. They may be unhappy, they might have to suffer. It's terrible, terrible! There should be a law forbidding all suffering."

Vera nodded and frowned, gazing out over the meadow spread before them. "Then," said she, after a moment, glancing at him diffidently, "then you don't advise Reno?"

"I never advise a woman, my dear," returned Appleby.

"No woman would ever admit that she was taking your advice," replied Vera.

"Would she take it?" asked Appleby.

"She would," said Vera, "but she would pretend that it was what she intended doing all the time."

She nodded and pursed up her lips, realizing suddenly that it was just possible Sammy had some rights in the matter. After all, marriage

had been as great a risk for him to take as for her. He might have some rather interesting views on the subject. "I'll write him that I've just found my father, and that when he and I become acquainted, I'll come back and get acquainted with him," she said, with a pretty little air of giving Sammy one more chance. Appleby sighed—for Sammy's sake. Getting married to Vera was strenuous enough, getting acquainted with her would be worst.

"Isn't that all right?" asked Vera. "Don't you approve of our getting acquainted? If Sammy knew me better—"

"If you knew Sammy," suggested Appleby.

"Oh!" Vera looked blank for a moment, then patted his arm with knowing condescension. "My dearest dad, I know Sammy from forelock to boot-toe."

"It may be just possible that Sammy also knows you," returned Appleby.

Vera frowned. Could it be possible that she was so simple that Sammy knew her even as she knew him? All his little faults and foibles were quite familiar to her. Could it be possible that she, too, had faults and foibles, and that

Sammy likewise "knew" her? Perhaps there was nothing to her to know. It was just barely possible that she was as simple, as easy to understand, as Sammy. She frowned thoughtfully, poking at the sod with her parasol.

Appleby smoked stolidly and turned again to his perusal of the Sunday supplement, his silk handkerchief, tucked in his collar, giving him the appearance of an elderly baby. It was a pleasure, Vera found, to sit with a man who was frankly indifferent to you at times. It gave her that delightful feeling of being at liberty to show her indifference to him and yet sure that he cared as much for her as she did for him. She pondered this new idea a while, and then poked her father.

"If Sammy treated me as you do, I'd pinch him," said she.

"What?" asked Appleby, turning to her a bit impatiently.

"I said," repeated Vera emphatically, "that if Sammy were as nasty to me as you are, I'd pinch him."

"Has to make love all the time, eh, poor devil," grunted Appleby.

"He has to show that I am more interesting than the Sunday supplement," declared Vera.

"My dear," said her father, "you're not." And he turned with relief to the pictured adventures of two small boys and a billy-goat.

At lunch, Miss Varney again presided, explaining in her low charming voice, with the little flutter of her hands that made Ricky's heart flutter also, that Miss Appleby was deeply grieved at her inability to meet her guests, that she hoped to be able to do so to-morrow at the latest. These attacks of hers were annoying, but not serious. They seldom lasted longer than three days. She hoped they would make themselves thoroughly at home and if they wanted anything, they must not hesitate to speak to Miss Varney or Mrs. Mainwaring about it.

"Would it not be better if we all left and returned when auntie is feeling better?" asked Mrs. Bingham, a tall slender woman, with a thin earnest face, rather plain, but decidedly "stylish." She had arrived the night before with her maid, her two pretty little girls and their nurse.

The women politely seconded the suggestion. But Miss Varney protested at the mere idea. These attacks, from which Miss Appleby suffered, were sometimes very short. Miss Appleby might possibly be down that evening to dinner.

"I could return the minute she recovered," explained Mrs. Bingham, glancing nervously behind her and pausing as though listening to pursuing footsteps.

"Really," protested Miss Varney, "I think Miss Appleby would be better pleased if you all remained. Of course, if you gentlemen have any business in the city—"

"Now, why should they have such important things to do that they are needed in the city any more than we women?" demanded Maude, covering Miss Varney with nervous confusion, as indeed she did every time she spoke. "Are we simply dolls, simply men's playthings, that our time and presence are of no value? We, ourselves, of no importance anywhere?"

"You are of importance to us, dear," said the unfortunate Tommy, trying to soothe her.

"In what way?" demanded Maude crisply.

"Merely as a plaything," she answered herself, before any one could speak.

Looking at Maude, tall and broad-shouldered, her brown hair flying in all directions around her large face and big features, it was hard to conceive of her as anybody's plaything. She looked, as she spoke, directly at Vera, and Vera smiled back, the infuriatingly friendly smile of the charming woman, sure of her masculine following, for the other woman plainer and less popular than she, and both were aware of it.

"I'm not sure sometimes which is the plaything," said Vera, "the man or the woman—provided the woman knows men," she added sweetly, sending the barbed shaft straight at poor Maude.

"Handle a man's susceptibilities as if he were a punching bag and had none and you're likely to get a punch," declared Van Tuyl.

Miss Varney, with all the tender heart of her, rushed to the defense of the misunderstood Maude. "Mrs. Peters—I mean Miss Lane—that is—er—er—Mrs. Brown—" She stopped in confusion, unable to think what Maude called herself.

"Mrs. Eve," laughed Mrs. Von Loben Sels. "Maude is right. We women should not lose our identity just because we marry. We are all Miss Eve, unmarried; when married, Mrs. Eve."

"But there was no Eve," said Appleby, "merely a monkey."

"Evolution is only a theory after all," retorted Mrs. Von Loben Sels. "Eve is a fact."

"A fact, where?" demanded Van Tuyl.

"In the Bible," declared Mrs. Von Loben Sels triumphantly. "We should prefer facts to theories."

"Evolution is a fact," said Harkness, a short, fat little man who didn't say much and thought less.

"Certainly," declared Maude, basely deserting her sex for the sake of science; "every one knows that evolution is so. The Bible was written in those old days—"

"It certainly is not modern," agreed Appleby, "or it would be listed among the 'six best sellers,' and it is not."

"It isn't very interesting," said Harkness.

"That makes no difference," returned Ap-

pleby. "There isn't a book written nowadays that isn't among the best sellers."

"Salt sellers? There ain't none. Just them little dishes," said the shrill voice of Anna, the maid, in Appleby's ear as she pointed over his shoulder at the small cut-glass salt dish beside his plate.

"Oh, yes, certainly," said Appleby hastily, glancing at the girl in surprise.

The maid gathered up the dishes and strode from the room.

"She is a 'new' girl and a trifle deaf," apologized Miss Varney. "She does not quite understand her place, and being deaf she makes more mistakes than she otherwise would. I am so sorry for her and so is Miss Appleby. That is why we keep her."

"New, you say," said Van Tuyl, taking a small pad from his pocket and unscrewing his fountain-pen. "Just over?" He paused, pen poised in air, and glanced at Miss Varney.

"I think she has been here a few years," answered Miss Varney, wondering if she had in any way already incriminated the poor thing.

"I know very little about her, except that her name is Anna Hogan."

"My paper," explained Van Tuyl, professionally important, "*The Voice of the People,* prints social notes, not of the wealthy but of the poor. Why not?"

He looked aggressively from one to the other and Miss Varney murmured hastily, "Why not, indeed."

"Er—er—real people?" asked Appleby.

"Certainly, real people," declared Van Tuyl. "Read the society column of any paper and what sense is there in it to the large majority of readers? 'Miss Jones spent the morning horseback riding.' Who of us cares a bent pin how Miss Jones spent the morning? About five out of the thousands who read the paper know who Miss Jones is, anyway."

"How many more, though, would know Miss O'Gallagher?" asked Appleby.

"As many, perhaps, as know Miss Jones," returned Van Tuyl. "But it is the importance it lends to you, you see. None of us knows Miss Jones, but after reading that notice, we

all want to know her, we want to spend the morning horseback riding. We immediately picture Miss Jones as a beautiful creature, a modern Diana, whereas she is probably short and fat and plain, with no seat and a poor mount. Now, I maintain that the rich are of no more importance than the poor."

"No, indeed," cried Nelly, looking up quickly, her cheeks flushing as she recalled the speech of the night before. "No, indeed, the poor are God's children."

"God is going at a premium, then," said Appleby. "We would all much prefer not to belong to Him if it means poverty."

"The poor—" began Nelly in brave defense of the absent Reuben.

"The poor least of all, my dear," smiled Appleby. "They say they are the favored class, but there isn't one of them who wouldn't just as soon not be so favored."

"Precisely," broke in Van Tuyl, not to be turned from his point. "But a notice in the papers as the rich have keeps them contented. They feel that they are some pumpkins. A contented person is neither poor nor rich."

"I should think it would be embarrassing," objected Mrs. Von Loben Sels. "Think of reading about yourselves like this, 'Mr. and Mrs. Von Loben Sels have just been ejected for failure to pay their rent.'"

"No more embarrassing than 'Mr. Van Tuyl of the prominent Van Tuyl family, of New York and Paris, was brought home yesterday morning at four A. M., so drunk his family was compelled to summon the doctor to administer quieting drugs,'" argued Van Tuyl. "But we don't put embarrassing notices like that in the papers. To return to Miss Jones, we read that she goes horseback riding, but just as interesting to the most of us, and far more typical of life, would be the notice that 'Miss Watts has left the employ of the Browns and been engaged by Mrs. Black.' Why not?"

"Everybody would immediately wonder how much more Mrs. Black offered her," objected Mrs. Bingham.

"Or why not," went on Van Tuyl, too engrossed with his theme to pay any attention now to interruptions of minor importance, "or why not, 'Miss Peters, stenographer for the

John MacCormack Company, at so and so, such and such a street, has had a raise for meritorious work'? The last two notices are life, they have the human touch. The first notice—nothing to it. Any of us can go horseback riding in the morning, provided we have the horse and the leisure. Not all of us can get a raise in pay."

A small woman at the end of the table sighed and nodded acquiescence. She was Maude's sister-in-law and an exact opposite, little and plain, with the gentle unobtrusive manners of a kindly old lady. One was seldom ever aware of her presence unless she spoke, and then one forgot it the moment after. She was dressed severely, but in exquisite daintiness. Her businesslike shirt-waist was of hand-embroidered silk with collars and cuffs of the finest lawn, also heavily embroidered. Her short skirt was extremely full around the top and the name of the tailor on the inside of its waist-band assured its price beyond all question. Either skirt or waist, by itself, cost more than the wages of a stenographer in a month. She had arrived that morning and was vainly trying to

get up courage enough to confess to Maude that to come and spend a week at Appleby House, she had been forced to give up her job.

"Yes," said she gravely, from knowledge at first hand, "it is very hard to get a raise."

"Cally hasn't worked long enough," cried Maude quickly, as every one turned in surprise upon Cally.

"I've worked three years," returned Cally, a bit defiantly.

"Why do you do it at all?" asked Vera kindly. "You look awfully white and tired, Cally."

"John broke?" asked Van Tuyl solicitously.

"Oh, no," cried Cally, "but no woman should be a parasite. I must be as economically independent as my husband is."

"If you women are economical and we men are independent that is a fair division," said Tommy, who had thought this remark up during the night as a result of a curtain lecture Maude had read him and had not had the courage to say it to her alone, as it were, and unprotected. He glanced at her now quickly, and saw, as did the rest of the assembled family, that he "was in for it."

Van Tuyl turned to Miss Varney and let the storm sweep over Tommy unnoticed, though he caught now and then the foolish sophistries of the present day and a lot of hackneyed phrases coined by uplift fanatics. "As to this new maid, Miss Varney, can you tell me where she last worked? Thank you. And her name? Miss Anna Hogan? Yes. Now, do you know where her house is? 159 Bond Street. Thank you. I shall call and see if I can get any news of the rest of the family, little social notices, you know. Maude, may I borrow Tommy's car?"

Tommy having been satisfactorily reduced to pulp by the combined force of the ladies, none of whom dared to refrain in the presence of Maude from a share in the annihilating process lest they incur a like attack themselves, Maude turned to Van Tuyl.

"Certainly," said she. "Let me take you, Freddy. I am terribly interested in this kind of people and I think your idea is fine. We should try to uplift them—"

"Uplift God's own?" asked Appleby piously.

"And where," inquired Harkness suddenly, "where shall we lift them up to?"

CHAPTER VIII

MISS VARNEY

MISS VARNEY softly closed Miss Appleby's door and crept down-stairs. It was late in the afternoon and the great house was wrapped in silence. The Bingham children and the Von Loben Sels relays had been lured to the lower meadows by their nurses so that not even their joyous shouts broke the quiet of the house and grounds. Van Tuyl, with Maude for guide, philosopher and chauffeur, and Nelly as a grateful companion, had gone to the slums for "copy." Vera had received a telegram from her mother that her contemplated trip to Reno had been postponed for a week that she might come to Appleby House instead, her dear child's interests being more to her than her own happiness. Vera had gone to the station to meet her in the clumsy old Appleby carriage drawn by two fat horses in slow and solemn

state. The rest of the house party in sheer boredom was sleeping away a few hours.

Miss Varney tripped down-stairs and at the foot met Harkness, fat and red, coming up to meet her.

"Miss Varney," said he, and stopped with a little cough.

"Yes," inquired Miss Varney, gently encouraging him.

"Er—er—er—" stammered Harkness.

Miss Varney smiled cheerfully with as much intelligence as the remark seemed to call for and patiently waited for him to continue.

"The servants—" Harkness began again vaguely.

"Have they been saucy?" asked Miss Varney hastily, her sweet face flushing, visions of wholesale discharges and Van Tuyl frantically writing notes in her mind's eye.

"Oh, no, no, no," returned Harkness almost irritably, as though she had contradicted him, pained that she failed so stupidly to understand him, "no, no, not at all, not at all."

"You wish to speak to one?" suggested Miss Varney.

A step was heard on the flagged terrace without and Harkness sprang past the girl and started up-stairs, two steps at a time. At the turn he paused and peered cautiously over the railing. The door-bell rang and Miss Varney turned in startled surprise from watching Harkness' precipitate flight and moved toward the door to see if it were any more relatives arriving to spend the week. The footman opened the door and his remarks to the man without were lost to Miss Varney in the hoarse whisper which floated down to her from over the railing at the turn of the stairs.

"If that is any one for me," panted Harkness, "I am not here, I am not here, understand, and I am not coming here—Miss Varney, if it is for me—"

"It isn't for you, Mr. Harkness," answered Miss Varney as coldly as it was possible for one so sweet to speak, and a bit disgusted with the stout man, she went forward to meet the footman who was bringing her a note of friendly query for Miss Appleby.

She took the note, and still gently offended with Harkness, walked down the hall to the li-

brary door and entered. In a big chair, in the embrasure of the window, she saw Ricky, calmly asleep, head back, mouth open, an unopened magazine on his knees. The window was a French one, wide open to the spring and the flies, and Miss Varney caught a glimpse beyond the recumbent Ricky of the quaint yew-hedge with the tiny gate that led into the peace and seclusion of the old-fashioned flower garden. Miss Varney was tired and worried. She wanted a few minutes before dinner and the rush of the evening to herself in which to collect her scattered wits and quiet her rasped nerves. A stray breeze, sweet from a violet bed, crept into the room and Miss Varney could not resist. She stole softly to an adjacent window and strove to open it without arousing Ricky. But the lock clicked and Ricky awoke, glanced around a moment in dull sleepiness, saw Miss Varney about to escape and pursued, taking a short cut out of the near-by window and meeting her on the top of the porch steps.

"Caught!" he cried with the joyousness of one who, having spent the entire afternoon trying not to be bored, sees a delightful diversion.

"Hand over the family spoons, and I will say nothing."

"There are spoons and spoons," returned Miss Varney, rallying her weary spirits to entertain her guest. She gave a bit of a sigh before she realized it, and Ricky was at once all tenderness.

His boyish face looked so kind and anxious, she laughed and gave him a little pat on the arm. "There is little to earn and many to keep," she quoted, smiling into his frank gray eyes.

Beyond the yew hedge, from the sweet seclusion of the flower garden, a thrush called softly in the warm fragrant twilight, one clear steady note with a bit of a trill at the end. The long shadows were creeping across the deep velvet of the lawn. Miss Varney, hardly conscious of what she did, lured by the peace of the coming twilight, descended the porch steps and strolled pensively toward the small green gate in the high hedge. Ricky trotted contentedly after her, wondering what she meant by "many to keep."

Could it be possible that she was married

and like Maude clung to her personality in her name, and like Cally, spurred on by Maude, was determined to be economically independent? These economically independent women always used all their wages to pay another woman to take care of their children, be the mother while they played the man. He looked at her graceful slender back, at the soft white of her neck where the hair clustered above the edge of her dainty evening gown, and decided that her back certainly looked delightfully, extravagantly dependent. Maybe she was divorced. The man was probably a brute and she had left him in self-defense and taken the children with her and now in her proud sweetness, having refused to accept alimony, was supporting them herself. This thought, too, he put aside. The innocence of virgin girlhood clung to her as the fragrance of the single rose she wore in the folds of her kerchief clung to the delicate pink petals. Who could the "many" be?

She had reached the gate and he hastened to open it for her, standing aside that she might pass in ahead of him. He bent eagerly and

asked impulsively, "Who are the many?" Then he flushed crimson at his unbridled curiosity and stammered forth a weak apology for his rudeness.

She raised her head and looked at him. "The many?" she asked, having already forgotten her quotation.

"The many men you are thinking about," said Ricky lamely, glad to hide curiosity under however crude a joke.

"Many—worries," she corrected him, smiling.

"Don't worry," pleaded Ricky.

"I have to," said she. "How can I help it? Miss Appleby—" she paused. Near the gate was a small rustic seat and she sank into it, instinctively drawing her skirts aside to make room for Ricky. "Miss Appleby—" again she paused.

"Must be a Tartar," finished Ricky sympathetically. "Begging your pardon."

"No, no," she shook her head and gazed down the box-bordered path. "She does not approve of divorce—"

"Nor of men, I guess," said Ricky cheerfully. "She never got married though she must have had chances with all her money."

Miss Varney nodded, hardly heeding his words in her own anxious thoughts and the relief to have some one in whom she could in a measure confide. "I am so afraid she will be angry."

"Angry? With whom?"

"With all," said Miss Varney boldly. "Where is Vera Van Fleet's husband?"

"Sammy? He's home."

"Are they—divorced?"

"Not yet, but they hope to be soon. You see Sammy wants the sitting-room called a sitting-room, done over in green with red roses and purple upholstery. Vera wants the room called a library, done in pastel shades with old mission furniture and one picture."

"If there were only more of you coupled and less uncoupled," complained Miss Varney. She fumbled in the soft draperies of her skirt and from some hidden source drew forth the red leather bound book, with the gold tipped pencil

attached. "You see there are so many of you, when she only expected a few and I do not know how to—break it to her."

"By jove," said Ricky.

"She may become very angry and leave all her money to charity."

"By jove," said Ricky. "I told Nel it was foolish to come. She wouldn't love us any more seeing us, probably less. 'Pon my word, that's what I said."

"Nelly," said Miss Varney thoughtfully, turning the leaves of the little book—"yes, Nelly Crane, her mother was an Appleby and she will be here to-morrow and Nelly's mother's second husband is coming with his fourth wife and his child by Nelly's mother—"

"By jove," interrupted Ricky, "sounds like a dog show, don't you know."

Miss Varney went on, not noticing the interruption, "—who is living with him this six months, the child, I mean, and Nelly's mother's third husband—"

"Spare me," cried Ricky. "My brain is only normal—too great a strain—" He waved the catastrophe airily aside, as too big for words.

"How am I ever going to introduce you all," wailed Miss Varney. "I shall have to use this book—"

"For heaven's sake, don't lose that book," begged Ricky. "It is the only thing that can keep us all straight."

Miss Varney, running idly through the book, nodded and paused at the H's. "Now, Mr. Harkness—he isn't married. His mother was an Appleby, but he—I am afraid there is something the matter with him."

"By jove," said Ricky. "Tuberculosis?"

"No—the law."

"The law?" stammered Ricky.

Miss Varney nodded firmly. "I think he is 'wanted,'" said she grimly.

"By jove," said Ricky.

"What can I do?" asked Miss Varney helplessly. "You and Nelly, and Maude and Tommy, are the only connected ones there are. The rest are disconnected."

"I'll telegraph Sammy to come," declared Ricky, all eagerness to help. "That'll be another complete couple."

"Yes, that will be good, and Cally's husband can be brought on."

"Surely," agreed Ricky. "We'll seem quite old-fashioned, everybody married to everybody else. Don't worry."

Miss Varney had cheered up wonderfully. "Vera's mother is coming," said she. "Why can't—" she paused and turned as beautiful a pink as the rose in her kerchief, "her father being here, too," she stammered.

Ricky understood her poorly expressed idea, but he frowned. "There are the biscuits, though, she always takes them around with her, Marjory and Kenneth."

"Biscuits?"

"The second baking," explained Ricky.

"But if Mr. Morgan is not coming, couldn't they be Applebys for just a few days?"

"We can try, anyway," said Ricky hopefully. "I should think they could, that they would be glad to," he nodded enthusiastically, as Miss Varney brightened more and more with every word he said. "Things will come out—"

"Get out of here, do you hear me? Get out

of here, I say! No strange man is allowed in these grounds—"

A high shrill voice reached them from the other side of the hedge, shattering to bits the evening calm.

Miss Varney rose hastily to her feet, all the brightness leaving her face, the immobility of the competent secretary enveloping her in its impenetrable folds as she slipped the book back into its hiding-place and hurried to the gate, Ricky after her.

"No, sir; you can't. Go at once, I say, go at once, or I'll call my mistress."

Miss Varney reached the gate and opened it before Ricky could help her. Mrs. Bingham's nurse, head up, cap bows quivering with indignation, stood facing the fourth assistant gardener, as he sought to take the path to the stables. Behind her, clinging to her skirts and peeping forth like two frightened chicks, were the children. Down the porch steps, hastening toward them across the lawn, her thin face ghastly white, her long ringed fingers clasped in dismay, came Mrs. Bingham.

"Maggy, what is it, what is it?" she cried.

Reuben Rubenstein, lean and dark and handsome, shabby hat on the back of his head, black eyes flashing, half amused, half angry, wholly disgusted, strove to make himself understood above the nurse's shrill treble. Miss Varney laid her hand on the girl's arm.

"Maggy, be still," she ordered.

"No strange man—" shrilled the girl, her round stupid face flushed.

"Maggy is right," panted Mrs. Bingham as she snatched the two children to her, "I can not allow a stranger—"

Miss Varney half laughed with vexation. "He is not a stranger," she cried firmly, leaving the girl for the mistress. "He is Reuben, Miss Appleby's gardener."

"Bah," cried the nurse, "the stupid creature, and why didn't he say so?"

Reuben met the merry glance in Miss Varney's eyes and his irritation vanished. Touching his hat to her in frank and instinctive admiration, which afterward made him furious when he thought about it, he forbore to answer and went around the house to the stables.

"Go in at once, Maggy," ordered the still

agitated Mrs. Bingham, "and take the children. You see, Miss Varney," she added as the maid departed, "you see I can not permit strange men—"

"Certainly," soothed Miss Varney, all tact and gentleness, "I suppose all mothers are worried lest kidnapers—"

"Yes, yes, indeed," agreed Mrs. Bingham vaguely, her eyes and apparently her thoughts still on the retreating maid and the children. "Kidnapers, of course, and detectives. Will you kindly request the gardener to see that no strange men of shabby appearance be allowed to approach the house? Thank you."

She nodded hastily and hurried after the children.

Miss Varney turned to Ricky in comical dismay. Ricky patted her shoulder.

"Never mind, never mind," he soothed. "I'll telegraph Sammy and we will get along somehow, only don't you worry. I can't bear to have you worry." His voice fell softly.

The long shadows enveloped them and from the flower garden came the sweet clear note of the thrush. Ricky put out his hand and Miss

Varney laid her little plump one in it. He raised it to his lips.

"Trust me," he whispered gently.

But Miss Varney's low reply was lost in the clear sweet call from the flower garden.

CHAPTER IX

THE REUBENSTEINS' WINDOW

ANNA HOGAN'S folks lived on the top floor of what Van Tuyl refused to call a "cheap" apartment-house.

"Cheap is a stigma of contempt," he explained to Maude as she skilfully drew up beside the curb and stopped the car exactly in front of their destination. "Because these people are poor, they should not be designated by words of contempt."

"Certainly not," agreed Maude, while Nelly's tender heart fluttered gratefully. "Reuben was poor but there was no reason for any of them to 'look down on him.'"

Peace and contentment, boiled cabbage, broken toys and an enormous phonograph reigned supreme over the Hogans' home.

"How do you do," cried Maude with the ardent cordiality of a long lost relative, as the door of the apartment was opened in answer to

her imperative knock. She was so afraid of appearing condescending that Van Tuyl flushed guiltily for her, with a mingled fear of the woman's taking offense, and of Maude herself.

Maude strode into the narrow hall and down it to the sitting-room, while the woman, her brain reeling in her endeavors to decide what relative this was turning up so unexpectedly, followed in dazed surprise and Van Tuyl followed her.

Nelly had hesitated on the landing, for just as the Hogans' door opened, the door of the opposite apartment likewise opened and on the threshold appeared Reuben Rubenstein. He stopped abruptly when he saw her and into his eyes leaped a look that caused Nelly to blush delightfully and to drop quickly her own shining eyes.

"How do you do?" she smiled, making no attempt to follow Maude and Van Tuyl, both of whom had forgotten her. "You—did not get hurt last night?"

Reuben laughed gaily. "No. I hurt others, you plutocrats who are crushing us poor people to death."

"Oh, yes," said Nelly, looking so small and slender and helpless that the idea of her crushing an ant seemed an absurdity. "We have come to—uplift," she explained.

Reuben grunted. "The Hogans?" he asked.

Anna was a pretty girl in her blank German way, and Nelly felt a sudden stab of jealousy for her great-aunt's serving maid because she lived directly opposite the home of the fourth assistant gardener. The pang was instinctive and Nelly crushed it out in sickening disgust with herself. It couldn't be possible she had fallen so low in this spring madness that seemed to envelop her as to become jealous of servants.

"Do you live here?" she asked, hoping that he didn't because Anna lived so near, and declaring to herself that it was no matter to her where he lived, not because of any claims the absent Ricky might have on her, but because fourth assistant gardeners and servants were no concern of hers at all.

"Yes," said Reuben, "I live here. Come in and see ma," he added with the hospitable simplicity of a gentleman unashamed of himself

and his family. He opened the door again and stepped aside to let her pass him.

For one moment, Nelly hesitated and caught her breath as one about to take a cold plunge. She had never been "slumming," and she had vague pictures of squalor and misery and dirt and sickness. All "poor people" were in the same class as far as she was concerned, all in rags, sleeping on straw in huts with the pigs and chickens and dogs. All were pick-pockets and cutthroats, illiterate, rude, repulsive, in a way different creatures, though of the same form as herself and her kind. She wanted to know just what kind of people Reuben's were and yet she didn't want the shock of finding them all her fancies feared. That they were precisely like herself, God-fearing, kindly hearted, simple folk, just a trifle less artificial than she, never entered her head.

The entrance hall was dark and narrow, but the room beyond into which Reuben escorted her was big and bright and shabby, clean and homelike, half dining-room and half sitting-room. In the two windows of the room were cans and pots of bright red geraniums. The

dining-table with its red checkered cloth, cruet stand, sugar bowl and tumbled napkins, was pushed into one corner. An open machine, littered with a half finished dress, stood in front of a window. On one side was a narrow lounge, well used from the dilapidated appearance of its springs. The wall-paper was dingy, the carpet worn, but the sun streamed in through the cheap lace curtains, a bird sang shrilly in one corner and over all was the infinite peace of home. Mrs. Rubenstein was a stout Jewess, with a round pleasant face. She was in a huge rocking chair, a small child in her arms, resting contentedly against her ample breast. She regarded Nelly in simple kindliness, much as her Great-aunt Appleby would, and nodded as Reuben introduced them. Nelly took a chair and glanced around timidly, in growing surprise. The furniture and curtains were cheap, but like Van Tuyl, Nelly quickly rejected that word as casting a stigma on things on which no stigma should rest. Somehow in that atmosphere, in the presence of the calm-eyed Jewess, things did not appear cheap in the full meaning of that word. It was home and

the furniture and curtains were part of it. The fat Mrs. Rubenstein rocked placidly, tenderly cuddling the little head on her arm and making no attempt to start a conversation.

"Isn't it pleasant here, up so high?" said Nelly, her spirits rising as she realized that in like financial circumstances, she might possibly do as these people did, might be precisely like them.

"Yes," said Mrs. Rubenstein, "we like it."

Reuben had eyes only for the girl, now and then glancing at his mother eager for approval. "It is nice here," said he. "We are going to have another window cut in front there, ain't we, ma?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Rubenstein.

"Won't that be fine," cried Nelly.

"We need more winter sun," explained Reuben. "The landlord says we can have it done. It will overlook the street, you see, and so won't be in the way if they build on the side of us higher than we are. We have to pay for it, though."

"Oh, it won't cost much," said Nelly eagerly, judging from her financial standpoint.

"No," agreed Mrs. Rubenstein. "It'll pay to have it done. The baby is ailing most all winter."

Nelly glanced at the big-eyed youngster, staring at her from the shelter of its mother's arms. He was hardly more than four, a thin little chap, with a delicate white face, thick black hair and the nose of his race, which in Reuben was barely observable.

"Poor little fellow," said Nelly. "Is—is he Reuben's brother?"

Reuben laughed at her hesitation. "Pretty young for a brother of mine, eh," said he. "But he is all the same," and he patted the small dark head, and his hard face softened.

"Reuben is my first," explained Mrs. Rubenstein. "I had sixteen between these two."

"Sixteen," gasped Nelly.

Again Reuben laughed. "Ten boys and six girls, " said he. "Most of them are still in the old country."

"Dead?" asked Nelly fearfully.

"Married," said Reuben.

"How many times were you divorced?" gasped Nelly.

"None," said Mrs. Rubenstein sternly. "I am a good woman."

"When we poor folks marry, we stay married," said Reuben proudly.

"Haven't you—can't you afford a divorce?" asked Nelly timidly.

"No decent woman wants to be divorced," returned Mrs. Rubenstein, rocking a little more energetically.

But Reuben was of the younger generation. He had tasted the freedom of this country at an impressionable age, and he was throwing aside the bonds of the old country and the older generations. "That's it," he agreed with truth. "We can't afford to be divorced, though we may want to be. We have to be careful, you see, and marry the woman we love."

He looked straight and boldly at Nelly, and into his dark eyes leaped again the look she had seen as he came upon her unexpectedly in the hall, a look which no woman can misjudge. Nelly caught one glimpse and looked away hastily, returning to the subject of the new window to hide her confusion. In her breast a turmoil, fright, not unmixed with pleasure,

guilt, oddly mingled with anger that he should presume thus on her friendliness. He should not look at her like that, he, the fourth assistant gardener. She would have nothing more to do with him now that he took such advantage of her kindly interest in his family; but after all what had he done? Nothing. She would have to wait for another glance before she could be sure she had seen aright, and meanwhile, she would not judge him too harshly. He was only a gardener, an uneducated Jew and even to think her thoughts was silly and lowering to herself. So she conversed hastily and in annoying confusion, on the subject of the window. Reuben, too, was shaken and turned to any topic for relief.

"We are going to put it there," said he, pointing, "between the window and the door. We know a fellow, a dandy fellow, who will do it cheap for us."

"He's a real good carpenter," added Mrs. Rubenstein.

"That will be nice," said Nelly. She rose, seeking a belated safety in flight. "I think I must go."

"What's your hurry?" asked Reuben, more nearly bursting with joy and pride the longer she was there.

At this the door flew open and two little girls of twelve and thereabout, ran in, flinging their school books on the table and chattering in high joyous trebles. Then they beheld the strange lady and stopped in shy confusion and slipped behind the high back of their mother's chair. They were fat, healthy little Jewesses with Reuben's good looks and the mother's placidity. Reuben introduced them and they nodded their pretty black heads, and one said bravely, "How do you do?"

Nelly protested that she must go.

"Come again," said Mrs. Rubenstein.

"Come when we get the new window in and see how nice it looks," urged Reuben.

"Yes, I will," replied Nelly, not knowing clearly what she did say.

She wished them all good-by and hurried out, hoping that Reuben would not follow her, but he did and in the narrow dark passageway, confusion seized her again. He was right behind her and she felt him brush against her as he

passed her to reach the door. In nervous haste to open it first, she clasped the knob and his hand closed over hers. Both drew back, more confused than ever and Reuben murmured an apology. Nelly laughed gaily, indifferently, her self-control returning as she realized that he, too, was embarrassed. She was the lady again, dainty, aloof, he the gardener, the underling; between them was the question of services and wages, nothing else. Well poised now, fortified by years of social training, Nelly waited quietly until he, fumbling awkwardly with the latch, managed to open the door.

She gave him a pleasant little inclination of the head and with a polite gay little good-by, stepped out into the publicity of the hall. But Reuben stepped out after her, shutting the door on the merry chatter of the children and the amused laugh of the contented mother.

She was offended now that he should know his place so poorly as to follow her. She threw up her head coldly and turned her back on him as she strove to remember which of the three doors that faced her was the Hogans' door.

"I am going back to Miss Appleby's," said Reuben quietly.

She was immediately furious with herself for fearing for a moment that he would follow her, tingling with shame lest he should think that she thought there was anything at all between them. She looked at him and in his dark eyes read that he knew why she had turned her back on him and that he was hurt. Once more her poise left her and confusion descended. She blushed hotly and turned hastily again to the three doors.

"Which is the Hogans'?" she asked, peering in the dim light at the dirty cards pinned on the doors and striving to steady her voice. Why did he always affect her so, he, the fourth assistant gardener? She must be going crazy, she told herself scornfully.

"The first," said Reuben, calm now, when she was confused, and not moving from the head of the stairs.

"Thank you," said she, once more looking at him.

He was very grave, very much hurt and she

felt as guilty as though she had struck a child. She wanted to apologize, but restrained herself from that complete absurdity. Apologize for what?

"I have to wait for my cousins," she explained, all sweetness again, to take that wounded look from his eyes. She smiled at him in friendly equality, no longer the great lady addressing a servant.

Reuben's face instantly brightened and eager admiration once more leaped into his eyes. He felt that he should go, but now that she was gracious again, he could not leave her without a last word, a consummation of the tacit peace between them.

"It is pretty well decided that the boys will strike," said he, unable to think of anything to say except of that which was his principal interest in life.

"Strike?" asked Nelly, secretly glad herself that all was again well between them.

"At the button factory," explained Reuben. "I haven't worked there for a long time, but I belong to the Union, and I am going to help at

picket duty. You see we have to fight for our rights."

"Yes," agreed Nelly, "but has great-aunt taken any of your rights?"

"Certainly," Reuben was all Socialist at once, burning with righteous anger that others should have what he coveted. "All of you rich look down on us and trample on us—"

"You don't seem trampled on," protested Nelly. "Your mother seemed as happy—"

"Happy," cried Reuben, "happy, dressed in that old calico wrapper with you in your swell silk."

"If I wore calico, you wouldn't mind then because your mother did," declared Nelly. "If we all had nothing, everybody would be happy. You only want to have what we have, or else have us have nothing."

"It is not so," cried Reuben. "We do all the work, you get all the fun. All we want is higher wages and the Union recognized."

"Maybe great-aunt can't afford to give you more," objected Nelly.

"Then there is nothing for us to do but

strike," returned Reuben. "We know she can afford it, though; besides, the money is ours. We make it."

"But if you don't like what she pays you, you can leave."

"We're going to, all of us."

"And find other work?"

"And keep others from working for her until she gives us what we want."

"That doesn't seem fair," protested Nelly. "The factory is hers."

"It may not be fair, but it's a strike," said Reuben. "You can't let a scab have your job."

"But if you don't want it," pleaded Nelly.

Reuben passed that over. He knew from experience that one could not argue with Nelly and keep one's sanity. "We are going to have a meeting next week and vote on it. I will let you know how it comes out. I have to go back now to—slavery."

He raised his hat and Nelly smiled, nodding gaily. He certainly was good-looking and he raised his hat with better grace than either Tommy or Ricky did. She watched him run down-stairs, even went to the railing to see him

the better as he descended the three flights to the street.

As she watched him, the Hogans' door opened and Maude appeared, followed by Freddy Van Tuyl and Mrs. Hogan. Mrs. Hogan was flushed and pleased, frankly indifferent to Maude, her undivided attention given to Van Tuyl.

Freddy drew forth his note-book and ran the pages over. "Here it is," said he, reassuringly. "Mrs. Hogan plans to have a few friends in for an informal gathering on the night of May twenty-fourth."

Mrs. Hogan nodded. "Ain't that grand," said she, ignoring Maude entirely. "Well, come again, Mr. Van Tuyl, and I'll give you some more news."

"Thank you, Mrs. Hogan, I will," said Freddy warmly.

Mrs. Hogan bowed them to the stairs, with the hauteur of a head waiter to a shabby diner turning to an absurdity the mere suggestion of Maude's uplift, condescending from her lofty pinnacle to wish that thoroughly dazed lady a distant good day.

CHAPTER X

MORE RELATIVES

THE way to the station was long, the horses, slow and sedate, so Vera had time to think, and her thoughts were all confusion. She knew that she loved her mother as much as ever, but where had her loyalty gone? Why did her mother no longer seem a paragon of all the virtues? She thought of her father and her face softened. She loved him and needed him, had needed him all the years of her pampered childhood. A stepfather, except on rare occasions, is worse than no father and especially when one feels that he is a false step, as it were, that somewhere out in the world, was the real father, the flesh and blood father, the only father. It seemed to Vera that her world was crashing around her ears. Her rampant loyalty to her mother had given place to a deep and tender pity for that lady, not unmixed with filial amusement. She loved her mother, but she

also loved her father and she realized that this last love could not be denied any more than the other. The two loves must go hand in hand down her life as long as she lived, and if the two parents could not or would not do the same, she, the child, suffered for it, but her suffering could not alter the love she felt for both, her longing for both, her need of both.

As she waited near the iron gate at the end of the train shed, the first person she saw among the stream of passengers was her mother, coming eagerly toward her. The sight of the fat little figure brought a thrill to Vera as it always did. She was passionately fond of her mother and the sudden realization that she could no longer look up to her in no way dimmed that love. Vera felt that even though her mother had disliked her father, she had had no right to turn his child's love against him, no right to separate them, no right to think that in the years to come when the child had assumed woman's estate and was as capable of judging men and life as her mother, that she would naturally feel toward her father the dislike her mother felt.

"But with all her faults, I love her still," thought Vera, hurrying forward with twinkling eyes. "If a person really loves another, goodness and badness can't affect that love at all."

Her mother was delightfully youthful looking in her short skirt and enormous baggy coat, hardly any older than Vera. Her stylish hat was small and rakish and in her immaculately gloved hand she carried an exquisite oddity in the purse line. Her round smooth face was flushed with anticipation and her eyes were bright and merry. Beside her, all in white, with big serious eyes, and thin legs, walked Marjory. Behind them followed an austere footman, a rug thrown over one arm, and behind him came a maid and a nurse.

"Vera, dear child."

Vera bent and kissed her mother gaily. "Darling, are you well?" she asked as she always did on meeting, though her mother was always the picture of blooming matronly health. She turned to Marjory. "Hullo, chicken, kiss your grandma."

"Not in public," returned the child coldly. "It is bad form."

"Silly," said Vera, taken aback.

"Hullo," cried a jovial voice behind them. "Where did you come from?"

Vera glanced around and beheld Stephen Mayhew at the head of an animated group of women, some older, some younger, some fat, some thin, all youthful, if not exactly young, and all extremely well dressed. Beyond the women was a group of white-capped nurses and what seemed to Vera a perfect swarm of children.

"More relatives," she cried, holding out her hand.

Stephen was staggering under a load of baggage, with a porter beside him, equally loaded and two freight hands sagging beneath an accumulation of suit-cases, hat boxes, golf bags, shawl straps and baskets. Stephen deposited his load on the platform and shook hands with Vera and her mother.

"All relatives," said he. "This is my wife," and he gently thrust forward the lady nearest him.

"I am Mrs. Alison Drake Fisher Parker," volunteered a small, anemic little woman, with

a pale pretty face. "How is dear Aunt Appleby? I have brought all my children so she could see them, all except Harold Fisher. It is his father's three months to have him, so I couldn't bring him, but Mr. Fisher has four children of his own, so he won't be lonely."

"I am Mrs. Fisher," said a pleasant-faced woman, stepping forward. "I have brought Harold. Mr. Fisher heard of Miss Appleby's request that all the blood relatives should spend a week with her and thought as Harold was a relation he, too, ought to come. Harold is here somewhere. Mr. Fisher was too busy to bring him, so I did."

Mrs. Allison Drake Fisher Parker turned hastily, anxiously. "Where is he? I must see him. Mr. Fisher's third child by his first marriage looks so very much like Harold, and is only two years older. It would be terrible if you had brought him by mistake and auntie should think he was my Harold."

"Yes, it would," agreed Mrs. Fisher. "But I am sure I have the right one. Doesn't Jimmy visit his mother this month?"

"I do not know. I have such a hard time

keeping my children's visit to their fathers straight, sending the right children to the right fathers, that I can't possibly know my former husbands' children's visits to their mothers. But if I remember rightly, Jimmy was given outright to his grandmother and lives permanently therefore with his father."

The two agitated ladies fluttered to the rear to inspect the children, and Vera glanced in amusement at her mother. But there was no answering gleam in her mother's eyes as there would have been in her father's. Vera sighed.

"I have a carriage here," she said to Stephen, "but I am afraid all of you—"

Stephen laughed. "Quite a bunch, eh?" said he. "You run along, Vera. I can get some taxis. I presume this town isn't wholly cut off from civilization."

"Mother," said Vera, when they were finally settled in the carriage, with the servants following in a station hack, "mother, father is here."

She wanted to break the fact to her mother gently lest the sight of Appleby should give her mother a shock, not dreaming that the hatred

for her father which the mother had unconsciously encouraged in the child was not shared at all by her mother. The years had swept away whatever bitterness Mrs. Morgan may have felt and left her rather curious and excited at the prospect of meeting her first love, with a tendency to remember only the pleasant courtship and the first happy years that had followed. The anger that had parted them had died entirely, and the good lady would have been surprised to know that Vera had suffered so much longer and deeper than she had over her "wrongs." When Vera told her that Appleby had already arrived, Mrs. Morgan was decidedly pleased.

"I shall be glad to see him again," said she, in pleasant anticipation. "I haven't seen him for years, and have hardly heard a thing about him in all that time. How is he, Vera? He was always delightfully amusing."

"He is well," said Vera, a bit surprised by her mother's calm acceptance of her news. She felt Marjory's eyes on her in critical gravity and wondered uncomfortably if her hair was coming down or if there was soot on her nose.

"Mother," said she, taking her courage in both hands, and speaking out, "mother, you must not go to Reno again."

Her mother looked at her in startled surprise, started to speak but was forestalled by Marjory.

"Vera, your hat is on crooked."

"My child," returned Vera coldly, instinctively righting her hat, "your nose is on crooked."

"It isn't."

"It is, pardon me."

"Mama, is my nose crooked?"

"No, no, dear," soothed Mrs. Morgan. "It is a lovely little nose," and she smiled tenderly as she ran her hand gently over the member under dispute. "Vera was fooling."

Marjory subsided for a moment, watching her sister with angry, lowering eyes. Vera turned to her mother and they chatted on indifferent subjects, neither caring to mention that which was uppermost in the minds of each.

"Mama, why does Vera make such a funny mouth when she laughs?"

"Never mind, love," said her mother, reaching across Vera's lap to lay her hand on the child's. "You wouldn't like it if Vera made any personal remarks about your appearance, so you see, dear, you should not make any about Vera's."

"But, mama, Vera said my nose was crooked."

"You didn't like her to say it, though, dear, did you?"

"I just as soon she should," said the child defiantly.

"No, dear," chided her mother gently, "you didn't like it."

"She said it, though," cried Marjory angrily.

"Children," interrupted Vera sternly, "should be seen and not heard."

"If you can talk, guess I can," declared Marjory and stuck out a small moist little tongue in Vera's direction.

"Marjory, dear," protested her mother.

"Mother," demanded Vera, amused and angry, "is that reasoning on your part or helplessness?"

"Vera, a child is an intelligent human being, we must reason with them."

"I shall reason with mine when they are prostrate over my knee, flat on their little tummies," declared Vera, "on the original seat of all human reasoning."

"Vera!"

Vera laughed at her mother's shocked amusement and Marjory closed the argument by again protruding her small tongue.

It was nearly dinner time when the slow horses finally reached the great house on the hill and drew up under the portico. Two taxis had passed it a good ten minutes before, so Vera knew that Stephen with his disjointed harem and warmed over nursery had arrived before them. The guests had begun to gather on the wide terrace in joyful anticipation of the dinner bell, the most welcome break in the monotony of the long day. Appleby strolled over to them as they mounted the stone steps, Vera slightly in advance of her mother.

"Mother," said she, turning, "let me introduce my father."

Mrs. Morgan laughed. "Vera, how absurd." She held out her hand to Appleby, smiling with pleasure. Appleby's quiet air of a distinguished statesman delighted Mrs. Morgan as much now as it had twenty years before. He was such a satisfying specimen of her own good taste.

"Henry Appleby," she cried, "who would think to meet you here after all these years."

"Everybody," smiled Appleby, taking her hand and holding it as he looked down at her curiously. "An aunt with forty millions is not a common thing. God's own would foreswear Him for a bit of the forty millions."

"God's own?" questioned Mrs. Morgan, who had never been able to understand her first husband.

"The jealous," explained Appleby.

"Helen?" asked Mrs. Morgan, naming his second and deceased wife and smiling with pleasure at the thought that he had always cared enough for her to make his other wife jealous.

"He means the poor, mother," explained Vera. "Dad says they aren't poor if they only

have sense enough to know it. They are simply jealous because we have the most."

"You are looking well, May," said Appleby, "not a day older, I swear. And is this my daughter once removed?" and he turned to Marjory.

Miss Varney joined them, followed by the devoted Ricky. She looked tired and calmly suppressed. Still the relatives gathered and every available room and bed in the house was full.

"Mrs. Van Fleet," said she to Vera, after the greetings and introductions, "I am putting your mother in the room with Mrs. Parker—"

"Put her in my room," cried Vera. "It is a large room and I am sure Nelly won't mind. There will be room for Marjory, too, if we crowd a little."

"Certainly," seconded Mrs. Morgan. "We shall be perfectly comfortable, my dear Mrs.—"

"Miss Varney," corrected Miss Varney.

"Married?" asked Mrs. Morgan.

Miss Varney glanced hastily over her shoulder, lest Maude be near and the inevitable argument take place, but Maude was at that mo-

ment in the library with the overwrought Tommy, trying to determine by the aid of the dictionary, the encyclopedia, a well-drawn diagram and the Appleby family tree, just exactly what her last name was with due respect for her individuality.

"Miss Varney is a female, my dear," said Appleby, "not a feminist. Therefore her Miss means a mistake somewhere."

"What's the matter, Ricky?" asked Vera, as she followed the others in. "You look as if you had just been refused a divorce."

"Worse than that," said Ricky. "By jove, I feel as if I were going mad. The wrong child has come."

"Wrong child?"

"The fourth Mrs. Fisher has made the horrible mistake of bringing the first Mrs. Fisher's youngest, instead of the second Mrs. Fisher's oldest."

CHAPTER XI

THE FIRST WIFE'S CHILD

MRS. Alison Drake Fisher Parker was naturally upset. When forty millions are to be divided, one does not like to have one's second husband's first wife's child on hand for a possible share in place of one's own offspring. The fourth Mrs. Fisher was grief-stricken.

"I am so sorry," she protested, over and over. "I generally can keep the different instalments of children separate. How I ever came to make such a mistake, I do not know."

"Where was Fisher at the time?" asked Van Tuyl.

They were all at dinner, Miss Varney having pointed out to the harassed parent, with the help of the rest of the family, that nothing could be done about it until the next morning, and meanwhile, one must eat.

"Mr. Fisher had gone to visit his first wife's children," explained Mrs. Fisher humbly. She

looked so charming in her dinner gown, so crestfallen and anxious to rectify her mistake that everybody except the lady concerned had forgiven her at once. "You see the law gave her the children but allows Mr. Fisher to visit them one week in every six months. Jimmy, the law gave outright to his grandmother."

Stephen sought to calm the unhappy ladies. "It may be," he suggested kindly, "that Aunt Appleby will be more favorably impressed with Jimmy than with Harold, and as she has never seen Harold, we can all pretend that he is Harold."

"Quite right," agreed Van Tuyl. "She will put Harold's name in the will, so he will get the money all right."

Mrs. Parker, instead of being comforted, was offended. "That is absurd. No one could be more attractive than my Harold. He would be sure to please his great-aunt."

"I don't see how I made the mistake," wailed Mrs. Fisher. "You see I was in such a hurry. Still, I was with Jimmy when he had the measles, that is I engaged the nurse who was

with him and I spoke to the doctor about the case quite frequently. I don't see how I got those two mixed up."

Mrs. Bingham's nurse stole softly into the room, crept up behind her mistress' chair and whispered a few words to her. Mrs. Bingham was at once all agitation. She arose without an apology and both hurried from the room. Miss Varney half rose, glanced in distress at Ricky and then subsided.

"One of the children rolled out of bed," suggested Appleby and the others, all save Ricky and Miss Varney, agreed.

"I am trying to have a small device put on the market," said Van Tuyl. "It is not very big, but I know I shall be able to make millions by it. I am simply waiting now until I can get the patent rights."

"What is it?" asked Ricky. "Something for *The Voice of the People?*"

"How absurd," laughed Mrs. Morgan, who had not heard the name of Van Tuyl's paper, "a cough lozenge, Freddy?"

"No, no," Van Tuyl shook his head impres-

sively. "It is to do away entirely with another such unfortunate occurrence as this that has just happened."

"Cast-iron marriage vows?" asked Appleby. "If you can invent a fastener to keep married people married, my boy, you have made your fortune."

Van Tuyl shook his head again. "Why stay married when you can get unmarried? No, my invention is a small metal tag which can be fastened securely to a child's arm or leg, wherever the temporary parent prefers, and on which is engraved the name of the child, its parents' names and the date of its birth. There is a bigger tag, on which one, a great many times married, can have engraved the dates each child spends with the other parent. This is convenient where there are a good many relays of children."

"That will most certainly be a blessing," declared Mrs. Parker.

"A godsend," cried the crushed Mrs. Fisher.

Van Tuyl nodded, highly pleased. "You see it will be of assistance to nurses, governesses and housekeepers, whoever has charge of the

child. Mrs. Fisher, it was probably the fault of the governess that Jimmy has come instead of Harold."

"I think it was," agreed Mrs. Fisher, glad to put the blame on some one else but rather fearful of doing so in the presence of the outraged parent. "We had just engaged a new one and she has not got the children straightened out yet. Mr. Fisher thought the other one was a trifle too young. She was twenty and had graduated with high honors from a school for motherhood, still, Mr. Fisher considered her too young. He was prejudiced, I think, by having seen her one evening in the Park talking with a young man while Jimmy and—er—hem—Jimmy was in the street trying to steal a ride on a car."

Mrs. Bingham returned. She paused inside the door and looked sternly at Miss Varney. A hush fell over the table in the presence of her evidently calamitous news.

"Miss Varney," said she coldly, all eyes on her, "Miss Varney, there is a strange man—"

"If he is looking for me, I am not here, I have never been here—I'm not coming here—"

Harkness had leaped to his feet, and napkin in hand, had disappeared from sight in three bounds and as many disjointed sentences, the last of which reached the ears of the startled diners even as he pushed aside the thoroughly surprised Mrs. Bingham.

For a moment no one said anything. Even Mrs. Bingham gazed in silence after the hastily departed. Miss Varney, not with any intention of doing anything at the moment, but through the instinct of getting on one's feet the better to handle the situation, rose.

"Mrs. Bingham," she said as sweetly as possible, with just a mere trace of coldness in her voice, "Mrs. Bingham, we often have strange men approach the house. The plumber occasionally sends a strange assistant, the grocer boy is not always an old acquaintance. There are book agents and business men, none of whom Miss Appleby cares to guard against on the simple fact of their strangeness."

"These are not book agents nor business men," declared Mrs. Bingham. "They are detectives."

"Miss Appleby has tried to live so that she

has nothing to fear from the law," returned Miss Varney pleasantly. "Be good; if you can't be good, be careful, is what we have tried to live up to." She smiled cheerfully and sat down again as if putting an end to the conversation.

"The detectives are after me," said Mrs. Bingham, her voice shrill with anger and fright.

"I should say after Mr. Harkness," said Miss Varney. "What—er—offense—" she hesitated.

"Offense?" snapped Mrs. Bingham.

"Why are you wanted?" asked Ricky shortly, helping Miss Varney out of a delicate situation.

Van Tuyl rose and pushed his chair toward Mrs. Bingham. "Sit down," said he kindly, "you are upset."

Mrs. Bingham, barely conscious of what she did, took the chair and a glass of wine Stephen handed to her.

"Thank you, thank you," she murmured hastily and turned to Miss Varney. "The children were spending their usual three months with me when I received Aunt Appleby's invitation. The decree of divorce forbade either my husband or myself taking the children out of

the state. But I wanted Aunt Appleby to see them, I didn't want to leave them behind me. My husband was out of town, I couldn't ask his permission, and I didn't know what to do. I thought how foolish in me to let them lose a chance of inheriting any money by leaving them in New York. So—I brought them—with—me, I couldn't come alone, I couldn't leave them for a week when I only have them three months out of the year." Mrs. Bingham bowed her head in her handkerchief and wept.

Murmurs of sympathy and condolence rippled up and down the length of the long table.

"If we women had the vote," cried Maude, "we would never allow such a situation to arise. This shows how the laws of men have failed. A woman, deprived of her children!"

"I know, Maude," said Tommy, in his usual pitiful blundering, "but until women can have children—without—er—men, it seems to me the children are half ours—"

"Half yours!" Maude was off, but Miss Varney, emboldened by the stress of the occasion, checked her abruptly, as much to her own surprise as to Maude's.

"Stop, Mrs. Maude. This is no time for a discussion of women's rights. Now, Mrs. Bingham," turning to that agitated lady in the sudden startled cessation of all voices but her own. "Now, Mrs. Bingham, tell us just why a detective should follow you and what you have to fear from one."

"My husband has heard that I have taken the children from the state," sobbed Mrs. Bingham, "and wants to convict me of kidnaping—" sobs.

"Kidnaping!" cried Maude, her eyes flashing and her voice trembling. "Think of the foul accusation—"

Miss Varney rapped sharply for order and Maude stopped, while Tommy barely suppressed a gasp of boundless admiration for the fearless secretary.

"You did not kidnap them, though, did you?" asked Miss Varney slowly, patiently, all the others looking to her now as the preordained leader in this distressing affair. "You came away openly—"

"No," stammered Mrs. Bingham, while the table groaned, "no, I was afraid to. I—I

sneaked away at night, I pretended I was going to my place on Long Island—"

"Write at once to your husband and explain," ordered Miss Varney.

"I don't dare to," sobbed Mrs. Bingham. "He is so mean. He hates me. He would come at once and take the children—"

"Brute!" from Maude.

"And there would be a scene, and Aunt Appleby would be shocked and would—not—leave me—a—cent—"

"Calm yourself," said Miss Varney. "Your husband certainly will not interfere when he learns you hope to have some money left the children if they are here when Miss Appleby can see them."

"He would," insisted Mrs. Bingham. "He disliked my getting a divorce in the first place and was perfectly horrid about it. He filed a cross complaint of desertion. And I did not desert him. I merely insisted on living in London. Why shouldn't I? All my friends and interests are there. But, no, he would not listen to me. He said his business was in New York. So silly in him, so unkind, when I

wanted to live in peace. I didn't want a divorce, until he refused to live in London—"

"Outrageous!" cried Maude.

"Then why not let the children return, while you remain," suggested Miss Varney. "Miss Appleby will remember all the children of her nieces and nephews. She does not need to see them all."

"She might take a fancy to one," objected and interjected Mrs. Parker, "and leave that one the principal heir, don't you see, my dear Miss Varney? That is why I am so anxious for my Harold."

"Of course," admitted Miss Varney, "there is always that chance. But if your husband knows that you have the children here, Mrs. Bingham—"

"He wants to be sure by sending detectives. If they can catch a glimpse of the children, he will have a case against me."

"Has any stranger seen them yet?" asked Miss Varney.

"Not yet," admitted Mrs. Bingham. "We have been very careful. But if any more strange men are permitted—"

"I do not see how I can close the grounds," mused Miss Varney.

"Get a woman policeman," ordered Maude, whereon Mrs. Bingham turned to her as to the proverbial straw. "I will telegraph at once to New York and have one sent here. She can patrol the grounds and question any one—"

"Miss Appleby may not like it," began Miss Varney, but Maude waved the objection aside.

"She can't have the slightest objection," she declared. "A policewoman is absolutely invaluable. What does a man know about the inner feelings of the women he arrests. A woman knows women and children and understands. Women's attributes have been needed for centuries in the world, gentleness, tact, love—"

"Will that satisfy you, Mrs. Bingham?" asked Miss Varney, quite boldly breaking into Maude's flow of rhetoric.

"Yes," said Mrs. Bingham. "My mind will be at rest."

"I will telegraph at once," said Maude, rising.

CHAPTER XII

HUSBAND'S DAY

NELLY had never been up so early before. She drew in a long breath of pleasure as she slipped out of the side door into the freshness and sweetness of the dawning. There was something so delicate about the new day, that she felt awed in spite of herself. She ran down the steps to the lawn and there, kneeling before a small flower bed, sheltered by the corner of the house, she saw the man of whom she was constantly thinking and because of a desire to stop such thoughts had arisen this early.

He looked up and saw her. All his face was transfigured, and Nelly's heart slipped a beat and then rushed on. She knew now. Once again she had seen that look in his eyes, the look she had wanted to see and yet feared to, not because she was married—marriage had made little or no impression on Nelly—but because she was a Drake, great-niece of an Apple-

by and he was the fourth assistant gardener. He was "common," she told herself over and over, impossible, on a lower plane than herself. Why did he attract her so? Why was she always so happy just being with him, why had she that horrible sinking feeling every time he left her? She felt that she was in a spell, bound and loving her bonds, with now and then a gleam of sanity, a crushing realization that nothing could ever come of these strenuous feelings, nothing but sorrow and heartache. In these sudden rare flashes, she knew that she would rather die than marry him, than sink to his level, much as she loved him. The mere thought of reaching his level gripped her by the throat with nausea, only to pass, leaving her trembling and eager to see him. And now he had risen and was coming toward her in the joyous flush of the new day, over the dew-wet grass, in his hand a superb white peony with a heart of delicate pink.

He offered her the flower with a shy deference, though his head was up and his eyes smiled straight into hers. Nelly took the flower with dainty pleasure, restraining a wild

desire to throw herself on his breast and feel his strong arms close tenderly around her. She wondered what it would be like to be in his arms, even as she took the flower, with a pretty, detached little air as of being in two minds about accepting it.

"It is beautiful," said she. "Do you like to take care of them?"

"I love to," replied Reuben, his lean face flushing. "When I make my pile, I am going to have a flower garden and take entire care of it myself. I like to fuss over them and try experiments with them, but I never have a chance."

"Why not if you are one of the gardeners? Doesn't Great-aunt Appleby let you?"

"Oh, she's willing enough that I should, but the Union won't let me," explained Reuben.

"The Union? Does it boss you?"

"No, no, certainly not, but I can't tend to flowers because that's not my work. Cutting grass is all I am allowed to do."

"But you love flowers so," cried Nelly.

"I know it, and I could make a great deal more money if I was allowed to take care of

them, but I'm only permitted to cut grass," said Reuben. "And talking of unions, reminds me that we have decided to strike—"

She sat down on the bottom step of the porch, the perfect flower still in her hand, and he sat beside her and explained about unions and strikes and pickets, while she listened, absorbed and happy.

Appleby House was old-fashioned and meals were served at stated intervals in the great dining-room and the silver tongued bell resounded through the house three times a day regularly, summoning the worshipers. The breakfast bell now aroused Nelly from her absorption.

"Breakfast," said she with a little move of disgust. "It's so beautiful," she added, dreamy eyes on the tree shaded lawn, "I hate to go in."

Reuben nodded. "I would like to spend the day in the country, flat on my back in some meadow, with nothing to do but listen to the birds and the brook beside me."

"Instead," laughed Nelly in one of her rare flashes of sanity, "you have to cut grass and I have to go in to breakfast."

She ran lightly up the steps and waved the flower to him, gaily. He smiled and watched her until she disappeared in the house. His eyes softened, his strong mouth twitched and standing erect, head up, he raised his hat, a loyal subject saluting his queen.

In the hall, Nelly found the assembled family anxiously awaiting the appearance of Miss Varney. Van Tuyl had a petition of some kind in his hand, spread out on a magazine, which he was urging Maude to sign.

"Maude," he argued, "it can't be that you do not approve of husbands in the abstract."

"Maybe she prefers them in the concrete," suggested Mrs. Von Loben Sels, sitting in a high backed, quaintly carved chair, Stephen Mayhew, Junior, in her lap, his short, fat little legs bare from knee to ankle. Her head was gracefully bent and her cheek rested tenderly on the small boy's yellow hair.

"In concrete," growled Tommy, who was making a few last feeble spurts of independence before he became hopelessly crushed.

"I consider that a sacrilege," declared Maude, motioning the paper aside. "A parody on the

beautiful, tender Mother's Day, the most sublime day in the year, the day when all of us turn in thought and public honor to the one who has reared us—"

"Not nowadays," returned Van Tuyl briskly. "Mothers disappeared entirely when women became economically independent."

Cally Brown burst into tears. As usual every one had forgotten her and the sudden sounds surprised them all, as much by recalling the mere presence of Cally as by the apparent grief she was suffering.

"Why, Cally," cried Mrs. Morgan, "what is it?"

"I can't help it," sobbed Cally. "You don't know how tired I get, working in an office all day. It's so small and cramped and hot and dirty."

"But Cally," cried Maude, "think of living off of a man."

"Horrible," declared Appleby. "Why not insist upon the man living off of you?"

"I know," sobbed Cally, unheeding Appleby's suggestion, "I must, I want to be economically independent, but I get to thinking—I know it's

wrong in me, Maude, but I can't help it—thinking how can it be any less womanly for me to dust my husband's bureau than to dust my employer's desk."

"Cally, Cally," chided Maude. "Would you give up the breadth of the outer world for the narrow confines of the home?"

"But I don't see any—any breadth in the narrow office, typing the same 'follow-up' letter every day," wailed Cally.

The harassed family stood in a semicircle and strove in vain to think of something comforting to say, but Maude alone found words to cheer the discouraged comrade onward to the goal of complete manhood. As a housewife, Cally was first-class, as an office employee she was decidedly third-class and would never be any better.

"Think of the birds," soothed Maude.

"But it seems so hopeless," sobbed Cally, "all my life nothing but a typist, because all my life, I have to be economically independent, and I haven't a business head, I can't seem to get along. I hate it so. I don't like business."

"I should suggest," said Appleby gently,

"that Cally think of her child instead of the birds."

"Why think of birds?" asked Stephen Mayhew, gazing fondly at the pretty picture Mrs. Von Loben Sels made in the quaint old chair with his little son cuddled in her arms.

Maude was distressed at such ignorance. "We must do exactly as the birds do. They are the highest form of life."

"Great heavens, Maude, lay eggs?" gasped Mrs. Morgan, who had failed to keep abreast of the feminist literature of the day.

Van Tuyl created a diversion by hastily presenting his paper to Nelly, and talking very loud, while all the others crowded gratefully around him and Cally sobbed on, seated in lonely feminism on the bottom step of the stairs.

"Now, Nelly, as a married woman, you will feel, I know, a very great pleasure in signing this petition to Congress to pass a bill instituting 'Husband's Day.'"

"Husband's Day?" questioned Nelly.

"Certainly," said Van Tuyl. "Husband's Day, why not? Who endures,—er—er—that

is—er—think of the heroism of it, a young happy man, care-free, untrampled, his own master, deliberately sacrificing all that makes life sweet—er——er— Husbands, you know are the backbone of the race. Without husbands, as you can see, there would be no race. Now, surely, you feel that there should be some public recognition of such self-sacrificing heroism—"

"Self-sacrificing to marry me?" demanded Mrs. Alison Drake Fisher Parker.

"Self-sacrificing, on whose part?" sternly from Mrs. Morgan.

"If anybody ever sacrificed herself," sniffed Mrs. Bingham, "to make a man happy, it was I."

"Ladies, ladies," soothed Appleby, "it is merely a flight of rhetoric on Freddy's part to get his petition favorably acted upon."

"Yes," agreed Nelly, "I think there ought to be a Husband's Day."

"Ah, then sign here." Van Tuyl, forbearing to answer irrelevant remarks, presented the paper and his fountain pen to her, and Nelly signed. "Thank you. Now you are one of us

and you must wear our flower, the emblem of the Day."

He put the magazine and paper on the hat-rack and from a small table picked up a vase filled with drooping crimson flowers on tall slender stalks. "I had these raised especially in a green house, forced for this great Day. Every one who believes in Husband's Day wears one and is proud to do so."

"What are they?" asked Nelly taking the flower Van Tuyl handed her and pinning it on her breast beside the single perfect peony Reuben had given her.

"The symbol of the Day," said Van Tuyl, drawing back. "What could be more appropriate for Husband's Day than that flower, our emblem, the bleeding heart!"

He glanced up and saw Miss Varney coming down-stairs. Immediately there was a rush as all rose and hastened forward to inquire about Great-aunt Appleby.

"What shall I do if she comes down to-day and Harold not here?" demanded Mrs. Alison Drake Fisher Parker in an agitated aside to Appleby.

"Telegraph Fisher to bring him," suggested Appleby.

"I will," declared Mrs. Parker, "but pray God, aunt does not come down to-day."

Miss Varney paused on the third step from the bottom, and glancing over the heads of the others, saw Ricky in the doorway, smiling at her. For just the fraction of a second their eyes met in mutual pleasure. Miss Varney smiled, but each man took the smile to himself, and the women were unimpressed.

"I hope aunt is better," said Appleby, who was nearest the stairs.

"Will she be down to-day?" asked Mrs. Bingham.

Miss Varney shook her head, and a sigh, half of relief and half of regret, swept the crowd. "Miss Appleby's attack seems more severe than usual," explained Miss Varney.

"Dear, dear," moaned Mrs. Parker. "Why isn't Harold here?"

There was a sympathetic murmur and Miss Varney went on. "She hopes to be up to-morrow and to have the great pleasure of meeting you at dinner. Meanwhile, she wants you

to feel perfectly at home and to let me or Mrs. Mainwaring know at once if there is anything that can be done to add to your comfort."

She made a pretty little bow, and waiting a moment for any one to speak, led the way into the dining-room and the breakfast table.

"Vera," said that young woman's mother, drawing her into a shady corner of the porch after breakfast, "I believe I shall go to Reno, after all."

"Mama," protested Vera, for a moment too startled by the suddenness of the declaration to say anything else.

"I feel," her mother went on, "that Aunt Appleby will not recover and that under the circumstances, it is useless for me to remain, indeed, not only useless—but—er—rather mal apropos."

"But, mama," protested Vera, "you can't get another divorce. You must think of Marjory and Kenneth."

"Marjory and Kenneth," repeated her mother, for a moment surprised as to what connection the children had with her divorce, then she smiled. "But, dear, I have made all ar-

rangements to leave them in the care of Aunt Belle in Maine. It was sweet in you to think of them—"

"No," interrupted Vera, "it isn't that, mother. Mother, you can't go. Marjory and Kenneth need their own truly, flesh and blood, faults and weaknesses father."

"Vera!"

But Vera, launched now on her subject, rushed on. "You can't judge whether or not in the years to come they will dislike him or love him. They are as much his as they are yours, blood of his blood, and they need him."

"Vera," cried her mother sharply, "you do not know what you are saying. I know their father from A to Z—"

"And he knows you, mother," said Vera gently, remembering her father's words.

Mrs. Morgan flushed. "What do you mean, Vera?"

"I mean that Marjory is going to grow up with her own father, not a half dozen warmed-over apologies for such."

"Vera, how can you talk so? When a man and a woman no longer love each other, it is a

crime, a deliberate sin, for them to go on living with each other."

"That's tommy-rot, mother."

"It is legalized prostitution," declared her mother, quoting from her favorite uplift magazine.

"All of us women are prostitutes at heart, mother," sneered Vera. "Really, it doesn't shock any of us so much as we pretend it does."

"Vera, how can you talk so?"

"But it's true, mother. We are brimming over with emotion, we are silly, nervous, hysterical. We are being swept off our feet with license. That's all it is, mother, license, not a new freedom. We all of us want to attract men whether we are married or not, just as much now as we did fifty years ago. The only difference is that now we can get out of the marriage we have got into by the flimsiest excuse, and we do it. We are all rakes at heart —weak driveling rakes. 'For better or for worse,' means simply, for 'better or for Reno,' with us. None of us is strong enough to endure the vows we take upon ourselves, none of us in this generation, anyway."

"Vera," cried her mother, "what has come over you?"

"Father," admitted Vera, then paused, her face flushing scarlet, her eyes falling before her mother's. Suddenly she leaned forward and laid her hand on the other's knee. "Oh, mother, forgive me, forgive me, but I can't bear to have Marjory judge you in the years to come as I do now."

"Vera!" The older woman turned white and stared into the girl's earnest eyes in wounded pride and mother love.

Vera sobbed. "Mother, I have always scorned father, always looked down on him as not worthy of either of us. You taught me to, unconsciously, perhaps, but you did. I grew up to think him a brute, a cad. Now I have met him, I a woman, he a man and, mother, I understand as I never did before, his side. I love him. I know he is weak, but I know that I love him and that I shall always love him. Good or bad, mother, he's my father. Nothing can change that, nothing can alter it. All the divorce laws in the world can't make me less his, blood of his blood, with his faults, his eyes,

his mouth. I am his, mother, as much as I am yours, and the woman who can give her children life and then for her own petty desires can deprive them of the other half of themselves is no mother. She's an egotist."

"Vera, Vera," her mother pushed her aside and staggered to her feet, white and shaking. "Shame, shame, to talk so to your mother."

"I am ashamed," agreed Vera. "Oh, mother, I am ashamed. I love you, I shall always love you, but I am sorry for you."

"Would you have had me go on living with your father when he deliberately insulted me, when he utterly disregarded his marriage vows?"

"Yes," said Vera, looking her mother straight in the eyes, "yes, I would. He came back to you."

"Back to me? And what is that but warmed-over love?"

"It didn't make him less my father," said Vera stubbornly.

"A woman has some rights of her own besides those of her children," declared her mother.

"She has no right to infringe on their rights," returned Vera, "and every child has a right to a father."

The two women faced each other a moment, Vera with her tear-wet handkerchief clutched in her hand, her eyes red and her nose sniveling, her mother with white face and dry, angry, hurt eyes. Slowly the older woman read the accusation of weakness in the eyes in which she had been used to see nothing but boundless love and admiration, and the change shocked her as Vera's words had not done. Vainly she strove to defend herself.

"Your father was an adulterer, Vera—"

"Most men are, mother, and many women, at heart. There is something awfully, horribly, terribly fascinating in adultery to all of us. Father fell but he was still our father. He came back, he wasn't what is called a 'bad' man. Your brother, Uncle Fred, did the same and you looked on his offense with leniency, mother. You continued to love him, you blamed the other woman in that case. We women should try to love our husbands as we do our brothers."

"My brother was not faithless to me," said her mother.

"That is why I call us egotists. *We* suffer, so we won't forgive. Another woman suffers, and we forgive the man."

"How could I, an outraged woman, go on living with your father day after day, when I had grown to hate him?"

"For our sakes," said Vera gently, "Charlie's and mine. We were little children, we didn't know anything was wrong. You could have hidden it from us and left us our father. And, mother—" Vera paused: "It would have been as the Bible says, when we grew up and understood, we, your children, would have arisen and called you blessed."

"Vera, Vera, after all I have done for you."

"I know, mother, I know. You gave me everything but the most important, the most vital need in a girl's life, a father. You petted me and spoilt me and cuddled me, and, mother, I love you just as much, but—I should have had a father."

"When a woman has ceased to love a man—"

"That's logic for the strong, mother; you and

I, and the great mass of the people, aren't strong enough to live without cast-iron laws. If we get married with the grim fact staring us in the face that once married always married, we would put up with a lot more than we do now when we know we can be unmarried whenever we want and can sooth our rotten little consciences with the sophistry of the present day that it's a sin to live with a man you no longer love. That's a devil's phrase, mother, and a breeder of weakness, not strength."

"I can not stay longer and be insulted," returned her mother, going slowly toward the door.

"Mother," pleaded Vera, "I'm not insulting you. I do not mean it so at all. I'm insulting all of us modern women who get divorces and then talk twaddle about them. We ought to stick by the first man through thick and thin, through sickness and weakness and poverty. Only by being strong ourselves can we breed strong children, morally and mentally."

"I refuse to listen to you any longer," and Mrs. Morgan swept majestically away.

CHAPTER XIII

SAUCE FOR THE GOOSE

NELLY was restless and nervous. She wondered where Reuben was and what he was doing. The information that Miss Appleby was still too sick to appear made little or no impression on her. She had lost all interest in Great-aunt Appleby, in Ricky, in every one, but Reuben. What was there about him that held her, she asked herself, miserably, that gripped her as Ricky had never been able to? She was shaken as she had never been before. The mere sight of him satisfied her. When he was present, she tasted a happiness both rare and complete.

After breakfast, she wandered listlessly into the library, intending to read, but paused instead before the open window and tenderly kissed the peony he had given her. Then she blushed furiously and snatching the dainty

flower from the front of her dress, crossed the room and tossed it into the paper basket, telling herself hotly not to be a fool. She, an Appleby, kissing the flower of an uneducated, common Jew, her aunt's fourth assistant gardener. The shame of it burned in her cheeks. She gazed down at the flower among the tumbled papers, and thought of Reuben, of his eyes, the way his thick black hair fell over his forehead, the way he showed his teeth when he laughed. She saw him again, approaching her over the lawn, the flower in his hand, in his eyes a look that made her thrill happily simply remembering it, and the tears leaped to her eyes. She stooped, all tenderness again and picked up the flower, gently smoothing its crumbled petals.

There was no reason why she should love him, but love was never yet reasonable for the sake of reason. She knew that she loved him truly and deeply, with a love she had never given to Ricky nor would ever give to another, a love, the like of which she had never dreamed existed. But Nelly was no fool. She knew herself better than any one else knew her and she had no illusions on the subject as a less

sweet-natured or vainer woman might have had. Miserably she asked herself if she would, could, let her love triumph over her up-bringing, and always doubted her strength to do so. Would the man be all sufficient or would the worldly side of her cling to those petty things she cared for that made up her life. She recalled the stout placid Jewess, rocking stolidly back and forth, with her pleasant face, big and round and coarse, the little child in her arms so distinctly a comical caricature. She recalled the two little girls, staring at her over their mother's shoulder, jolly little girls, but so painfully "common." Could she endure them? For Reuben's sake could she overlook his family? After all, he was himself, and she would not be marrying the family. Why should the family count against him? The Rubensteins, too, were not vulgar. They were simple, kindly hearted, uneducated. Conventions and formalities did not appeal to them with their primitive, direct simplicity. They were clean and wholesome. So Nelly told herself with conviction, and yet the thought of presenting Mrs. Rubenstein to Great-aunt Appleby as a mother-in-law was

unbearable. She pictured Mrs. Rubenstein in her mother's drawing-room and shuddered, though she told herself sternly that a drawing-room was not life.

Van Tuyl hurried into the room.

"Hullo, Nel, coming with me?"

"Where?" asked Nelly, busy rearranging the peony in the front of her frock.

"*The Voice of the People* is most enthusiastic about Husband's Day," explained Van Tuyl, rummaging in the desk for his note-book. "I want to get the opinion of various people on it, so I am going to begin with my friend, Mrs. Hogan."

"Mrs. Hogan?" gasped Nelly.

"And why not Mrs. Hogan?" demanded Van Tuyl. "The poor form just as accurate opinions on the true subjects of life as the rich; why shouldn't they be given a chance to express their opinions? We are too used to thinking that if a woman has a million she is a worthy criterion on every subject. Now, that's all wrong. She may know the technique of a Wagnerian drama better than a woman who has never had a chance to hear one. I grant

that. But petted, sheltered always, what view of real life can she possibly have save a garbled one through rose-colored glasses? Read any paper quoting opinions of people on the various new movements of the day. 'Mrs. Peters when seen by a press reporter, says thus and so.' Now, answer me truly, don't you at once feel because the paper quotes her, that she is exceptional in some way? Certainly you do, we all do. We at once bow down before her and make her opinion our own, when nine times out of nine, she has only read articles about the subject on which she herself and all of us at once consider her an authority. It is a silly discrimination. The poor live, the rich read. Therefore, *The Voice of the People* goes to the poor for first-hand, accurate, clear-headed, human opinions."

Nelly nodded, enraptured. Maybe Mrs. Rubenstein would be consulted as to Husband's Day. She knew the opinion of that stout placid woman would be grimly logical if nothing else. Van Tuyl made her feel almost capable of being her true self and taking Reuben for himself. If the others in her family were like Van Tuyl, she

knew she would in all probability go straight to the man she loved, but she knew they would not be and the fear of their natural surprise and disapproval restrained her nearly as effectively as her own aversion to his family.

"Coming?" asked Van Tuyl, snapping a rubber band around his note-book.

"Yes," said Nelly, always grateful to him for his defense of "the jealous." "Wait until I get my hat."

The upper hall of the apartment-house where the Hogans and Rubensteins lived, echoed and re-echoed to a heated altercation as Van Tuyl and Nelly climbed the steep narrow stairs. Nelly recognized Mrs. Rubenstein's voice and blushed in gripping shame as for something near and intimate. She glanced at Van Tuyl in fear lest she should see disgust on his face, disgust for her as well as the voluble lady above them. But Van Tuyl was mercifully unaware of any connection between his aunt's house and the stout Jewess they came upon in the open door of her apartment, arms akimbo, black eyes shining, expressing her opinion in the most unmistakable terms of scorn and right-

eous anger to a crushed humble specimen of her own race and opposite sex who faced her timidly, hat on the back of his head, carpenter's kit in one hand, trying vainly to get in half a word somewhere, somehow.

"*The Voice of the People,*" suggested Nelly, with unexplained bitterness.

"A good strong human voice," declared Van Tuyl. "They know what they want and in the long run, they get it, politicians notwithstanding."

"Aren't we people?" asked Nelly plaintively, seeking for some connection between the two classes besides snobbery and jealousy.

"We are but we hate to admit it," returned Van Tuyl.

"*Ach,* but you said you'd do it for five dollars, and here you are raising it to six. Six dollars just to put in one window—What? Of course you'll have to cut the hole, but six dollars for a hole! What do you think we are, eh? The head of the Rothschilds? John D. Rockerfeller? Six dollars? Go away, we don't want you—"

The flat door slammed with a loud bang be-

fore the angry woman had a chance to recognize the girl, standing at the head of the stairs, listening painfully to every word, but keeping her shamed eyes turned away.

"What's the matter?" asked Van Tuyl of the young Jew, who turned to leave, still half dazed by his reception.

"They asked me to make a winder in their room and now they won't pay me what I ask," replied the young fellow.

"What do they want to pay you?" asked Van Tuyl, getting out his note-book. Instead of mention of Mr. So and So's participation in a polo match, how much more full of human interest an item as to Mr. Spitzenhammer's dispute over wages!

"Five dollars," sneered the young man. "Only a dollar less and it's some job to cut a window."

"You make the window; therefore, you own it," spoke up Nelly suddenly. "You have a right to charge what you want for it."

The young man turned to her rather dazed, his mind not yet grasping the finer claims of labor.

"Naw, I won't own the winder—"

"But you make it," objected Nelly, her cheeks blazing as she applied to real life the words of her hero. "It's a law of the universe, a law of God, not man, that we own what we make."

"Not always," contradicted Van Tuyl, gazing in surprise at the usually sweet and quiet Nelly thus rampantly taking up arms in a neighborhood dispute. "We can make trouble, and it won't be ours, but the other fellow's."

The door of the Hogans' apartment opened and Mrs. Hogan, having heard and recognized Van Tuyl's voice, appeared in the aperture. Her hair was unkempt as she had not had time to brush it for the day, her dress was soiled and her apron still more so. She was still wiping her hands, wet from washing the dishes.

"Good morning," said she.

Van Tuyl turned to her. "Ah, Mrs. Hogan," said he, raising his hat: "I have come to learn your opinion as to Congress passing a bill to institute as a national holiday, a Husband's Day, with the bleeding heart the flower."

"Come in," said Mrs. Hogan, very much flattered. "Come in, Mr. Van Tuyl."

Van Tuyl followed her in, forgetful of Nelly, but Nelly was so absorbed in this instance of labor struggling against capital, so often and clearly explained to her by Reuben, that she made no move to go with them.

"Why won't they give you the six dollars you ask for?" she questioned the young Jew, eagerly. Could it be possible that Reuben refused to do for others what he demanded her aunt should do for him, raise his wages at once, the moment he demanded, whether she could afford to do it or not? Was it possible that Reuben who preached on street corners of the brotherhood of the poor was trying to beat down a fellow workman?

"They say it is too much to ask for the work," said the Jew, scowling over the Rubensteins' parsimony and pouring out his story of injustice to this girl who though a stranger was apparently sympathetic.

And Nelly listened, the horrible fact bursting upon her in all the radiance of truth, like the

sudden flash from an electric lamp, that there was nothing to be done here under the circumstances save to strike. Her heart was beating fast and her eyes were bright. For a moment she hesitated, wavered against the holy cause of labor where her love was so intimately concerned on the opposite side, but it was only for a moment. She recalled his burning words that morning when he sat at her feet on the front stoop and poured out his undying principles on her willing ears. The war of labor was a holy war and the man who wavered, who hesitated, was a traitor, a coward. Though her heart bled in the doing of it, still it must be done. She drew a long breath and laid her hand on the strange young man's arm.

"Mr.—Mr.—"

"Gottleib."

"Mr. Gottleib, you must strike."

"Strike?"

"Yes," Nelly nodded her head, firmly now that she was finally, definitely, launched in the Cause. "You must strike, and all strikes to be effective have to have pickets. No one must be

allowed to do this job until the Rubensteins agree to your just demands."

"*Ach,*" said Mr. Gottleib.

"I will help you," said Nelly bravely. "We can sit on these stairs and allow no one to enter the Rubensteins' apartment."

"*Ach,*" repeated young Mr. Gottleib.

Van Tuyl, some little time later, emerged from the Hogan apartment, stared in surprise at his dainty cousin in her bewitching morning costume of old rose, sitting on the top step, apparently in contented, but silent communication with the young workman whose services had been declined and who was sitting stolidly beside her. Well, thought Van Tuyl, all women nowadays are slumming, the fit and the unfit. There was really nothing surprising in the situation. With the lower classes held up to eulogy as they are now in story and play, the surprising thing would have been to see Nelly sitting with a gentleman.

"Coming home, Nel?" he asked.

"Not now," said Nelly shortly.

"Er—er—do you want me to stay?"

"No, thank you," replied Nelly. "We two are enough."

"Too many," thought Van Tuyl, raising his hat and hurrying down-stairs.

The morning passed somehow. It was clear that neither the Rubensteins nor the Hogans were over-pressed with business or callers. All the morning, no one came higher than the floor below them. Faintly the street sounds penetrated the three flights of stairs to the pair sitting on the topmost step. Now and then, a team rattled by from the corner, barely audible, came the jangle of the car bell and the grinding of brakes. Once a huckster passed in the narrow sunny street, calling his wares. Occasionally the front door of the apartment-house, far below them, would open and the light of day would rush upward to the opaque twilight above. Once a man came in whistling, and tramped noisily up the first two flights while Nelly's heart contracted with sudden fear and she asked herself in a panic what she could do if he proved to be a strike-breaker and insisted on walking past her into the Rubensteins' apartment.

As the sound of his footsteps mounted upward, she glanced diffidently at her companion, but the glance was hardly reassuring. Mr. Gottleib did not look strong physically. He was tall and thin, with a long stupid face, great round eye-glasses and a frank disregard for collars. Nelly, listening miserably to the approaching footsteps of the light-hearted man below, felt that in the strenuous phase of picket duty, Mr. Gottleib would hardly excel with undiminished luster. While as for herself, when moral suasion failed, she might as well retire for all the good she could do. Still, on the other hand, the stairway was narrow. She and Mr. Gottleib, seated side by side, were a rather tight squeeze, and that was to the disadvantage of the attacking force, which would not be able under any circumstances, to advance more than two abreast. She thought of Horatius, on "yon straight bridge" where "a thousand may well be stopped by three," and took heart again, just as the man below turned off into one of the third-floor apartments.

Long before noon, Nelly was so hungry she thought she would die and so end her troubles.

Mr. Gottleib sat like a granite image, silent, immovable, apparently immune to the human failings of hunger and thirst and heat. For as the morning advanced, the heat became unbearable. Save when some door opened for a minute or two, no breath of air reached the two, perched in lonely grandeur for labor's sake, on the top step of the third flight of the narrow apartment-house stairs. After what seemed to Nelly a long and well spent lifetime, there came to them faintly the myriad whistles of noonday from factories and train yards. Mr. Gottleib immediately reached for his carpenter's kit which he had rested on the step below them, and placing it on his lap, opened it. At once the hot narrow confines of the strike zone were permeated with the strong odor of decaying flesh.

"Oh!" gasped Nelly.

Mr. Gottleib looked at her curiously through his round heavy glasses and spoke shortly.

"Limburger."

"Oh!" repeated Nelly. She felt that she was going to faint.

"Take some." Mr. Gottleib generously broke

the cheese in half as nearly as he could and gallantly presented her with the biggest portion and one banana; the limburger and two bananas constituting his lunch.

"Oh, I couldn't," protested Nelly.

"Aw, gwan, I can't eat it all," lied Mr. Gottleib generously.

Nelly once more firmly faced the situation as it was. If she left him to get some lunch, the strike breakers might appear, and alone, Mr. Gottleib would be worse than useless, and for the same reason, she could not send him to buy her something. Together, they might possibly put up a feeble fight in the holy cause of labor, but alone, each would be able to do nothing but ignominiously surrender. She could refuse the cheese, but one person eating it would take twice as long to dispel that fearful odor as would two. It was self-preservation to eat that cheese. She held out her hand and in the dimness of the hall, closed her eyes and ate.

About half-past one, the front door below them opened and two men ran hastily upstairs. Fearfully the two on the topmost step listened, and Nelly for one prayed silently that

the intruders would again turn off into one of the lower apartments. Her prayer was unanswered. Young Rubenstein, followed by a stranger, nearly stumbled over the two strikers, waiting in cold dread.

"Hullo," said he, then recognizing Nelly, his face flushed with surprise, jealousy, pleasure. He raised his cap. "Howdy-do," said he, a bit stiffly, pausing and looking from one to the other, unable to grasp the full meaning of the situation.

"How do you do," replied Nelly, and strove to still the beating of her heart.

"Oh, Gottleib," said Reuben, "mother telephoned me that you had refused to do the job for five dollars, so I've got Mr. Murphy here to do it."

Gottleib made no reply, looking with boundless faith to his captain.

Nelly coughed nervously. "Mr. Murphy can not do the job," said she, her voice trembling in spite of her.

"Can't do it?" questioned Reuben.

"You must pay Mr. Gottleib what he asks," insisted Nelly.

"Murphy will do the job for four dollars," returned Reuben, smiling tenderly at her.

"He can not do it," declared Nelly, bold with desperation. "We will not let him."

"Oi'd loike ter see the man thut can stop me," said Murphy.

"Hush," Reuben silenced him, laying his hand on the Irishman's arm. Murphy hushed, muttering sullenly, and even in that moment of fearful suspense, Nelly thrilled at Reuben's power to control men. Her hero was no weakling. He would see their side and admit the justice in it. She rushed into an eager explanation.

"You see, Reuben, you must let Mr. Gottleib have the job for six dollars, because you insist on Great-aunt Appleby paying you ten cents more an hour than she does. If she refuses, you aren't simply going to leave the factory and get work elsewhere, letting others who are willing to work for what she gives have your place, but you are going to refuse to let any one else do the work whether they want to or not. So we can't let Mr. Murphy work here for less than Mr. Gottleib is willing to take."

"The cases are not the same," returned Reuben gently, realizing the impossibility of arguing with Nelly.

"Excuse me, but they are," insisted Nelly. "You do not like what my aunt is willing to pay, and yet you won't let others who would be glad to get it, work for her."

"But, Nelly," explained Reuben in the tones of a father to an erring child, in the heat of the moment, neither of them realizing that he had used her first name, "but, Nelly, this is a private affair—"

"A man out of work and willing to work for what my aunt is willing to give, is a private affair," returned Nelly pleadingly. Could it be that her hero was not just? That he had a different law for different people?

Reuben waved her remark aside as the puerile inanity of the very young. "We can not afford to pay Gottleib six dollars—"

"My aunt can not afford—"

"But this is private, simply between Mr. Murphy and us—"

"My aunt is private—"

"Nelly, I will not be imposed upon. This is America where all men are equal and if I want to hire Murphy, I shall—"

"You shan't," said Mr. Gottleib.

Of what happened during the next quarter of an hour, Nelly never afterward had a very clear idea. That Mr. Murphy was Irish and red-haired and firmly convinced as to the inherent right of man to labor where and for whom he pleases at whatever pay he wishes, was apparent. It was equally clear that Mr. Gottleib was as firmly convinced of the divine right of unions to dictate when and where men shall work, for whom and for what pay. Nelly had confused recollections of tumbling men, of waving arms and flying legs, of doors opening, of people crowding into the hall and pushing up-stairs, of shouts and screams and swear words. The long, lean, spectacled Mr. Gottleib proved himself no mean champion of unionism. Even in the midst of the fray, Nelly was aware that she had misjudged him. Her next rational moment was when she came to herself and found Reuben leading her down-stairs, gently,

but firmly and hastily. Above, the holy war of unions versus individual freedom was still being waged.

"You are not fair, you are not fair," sobbed Nelly.

Reuben made no reply until they had reached the street, which, generally so quiet and deserted, was rapidly filling with an excited throng, eagerly surging toward the scene of battle.

"I will take you to the car," said he, taking her by the arm and piloting her quickly through the gathering crowd. "You can get home, can't you, alone?"

"Yes," replied Nelly coldly. Her hero was made of clay. He had one law for one class and another law for another. She scorned him now as deeply as she loved him. She wanted to cry because he was not what she had fancied him to be. He had not measured up to her estimate of him. The holy war waging above them was entirely forgotten, of minor importance beside the fall of her hero.

Reuben, as love-sick as the girl, clear-eyed in his new-found longing for her, realized that

she, incapable of the clear logic of himself and the labor leaders, was hurt with him, that she in some way misjudged him, and his heart was as near breaking as hers when he helped her on the car.

"Will you be all right?" he asked humbly.

She turned on the top step and glanced down at him. He was looking up at her, still clinging to the car rail. His dark eyes were filled with reproach, with love, with anguish, and as she looked into them, her heart throbbed quickly, she felt dizzy, confused. She could only nod dumbly and turn away to enter the car, all athrill with perfectly illogical joy that he should so love her.

CHAPTER XIV

A GAY DOG

APPLEBY always believed that if he had not been a lawyer, if his up-bringing had been different and if his life had been slightly changed, he would have been a farmer. Never having lived on a farm longer than a month at a time as a "summer boarder," he knew nothing whatever about a farmer's life, but judged it to be simple and he liked simple things. He liked to prowl around his aunt's well-established stables and plan what he would do with them if, he being the oldest living relative she now had, she should make him her heir. He liked to watch the high-priced, registered stock, and to go out in the small dog-cart behind the blooded mares. No puffing motor-car, no hired chauffeur, just the sweet simplicity of the country and his stylish rig for him. He liked to stroll in the orchard and examine the fancy

pear trees, the exotic peaches and the tenderly nurtured, rare grade apples and estimate the size of the crop and decide what he would do with it if it were his.

The lower end of the orchard was next to the meadow, separated from it by a picturesque, but extremely well-laid and well-priced stone wall. When Appleby reached it, at the end of a row of trees, he peered casually over. The long sloping meadow, bush bordered, was a pleasant place and Vera had taken to spending her afternoons there in its sheltered peace. As Appleby, half expecting to see his daughter, glanced over the wall, there was a groan, a mumbled oath, and he found himself looking down into the round fat face of Harkness, blanched to a sickly white. But there was a gleam of bravery in his small unhappy eyes, caught, thus, as he thought, helpless and incapable of flight. He recognized Appleby and the color rushed back into his face as he rose angrily.

"Well, now, Henry," he demanded, "what are you doing, sneaking up on a fellow like that? Great Scott—"

"Hold on, Tom," said Appleby mildly, rais-

ing his hand. "I have been looking at the trees, very fine orchard, very fine, indeed."

"Much you know about it," sneered Harkness, still upset. "I thought you were a stranger—"

"See here, Tom, what's the matter with you; what have you done, that you are so afraid of being arrested—"

"Get over," said Harkness, motioning to the wall, "and I'll tell you. You are a lawyer, Henry; I should have asked your advice before."

Appleby leaped the wall and both men made themselves comfortable among the long grasses with the wall for a back rest. Appleby removed his hat and Harkness kicked aside the papers he had been reading.

"You see, Henry, they are trying to serve papers on me—"

"For what?" asked Appleby, coldly professional, regarding the fat Harkness in the analytical calm, the keen scrutiny of the practical lawyer, while visions of milking time and fatted calves disappeared in the dim haze of the law.

"They—they haven't served me—yet," said Harkness, eying his companion in his turn, his round dumpy figure sagging dejectedly, his thick neck showing red above his collar and the big bags of purplish flesh beneath his eyes making them appear even smaller than they were and decidedly sly and a bit too sharp. "I got a tip that they were after me just as I received aunt's telegram, so I slipped down here without letting a soul know."

"Without consulting a lawyer?" asked Appleby.

Harkness nodded. "Time enough to consult a lawyer after I have been served."

Appleby grunted. "Why are you being served? You haven't got married on the quiet, have you, Tom?"

"No, no," Harkness assured him quickly. "No, no. I—they—I am—"

"Yes," encouraged Appleby.

Harkness glanced at his companion, turned a bright red, verging on purple and looked quickly away. "Alienating Gracie's affections," he mumbled.

Appleby gazed at the comical little man, fat

and dumpy, with his bald head, his baggy eyes and his fifty years, and strove kindly not to burst into roars of laughter. It was grotesque, pitiful, Harkness sued for alienating any woman's affection. Appleby coughed mildly and gazed earnestly at a drifting cloud up in the soft blue sky of May, his professional courtesy restraining him.

"Dummit," snapped Harkness, "laugh if you want to."

And Appleby laughed. "Tom, Tom," he roared, "what have you been up to? Fifty years if you're a day and still the gay dog!"

Harkness puffed out his purple lips and frowned. The whole affair was painful to him. "He wants two hundred thousand," he muttered. "That's about all I own."

"He won't get it," said Appleby kindly.

Harkness had the pessimism of personal trouble. He shook his head gloomily. "He may."

"No, no," said Appleby, forgetting his professional etiquette, forgetting everything but the absurdity of Harkness alienating any woman's affections. "No jury would award

him a cent if they saw you, old man. Don't you fret." And leaning forward, he patted his cousin's knee.

"Huh," grunted Harkness, "I could have done it as well as any man, but what I maintain is that she didn't have any affections to alienate."

"How'd it start?" asked Appleby.

"Why, he asked me to his apartment and there I met his wife. She was crazy about me, first look. But I maintain that a woman like that has no affection to give any man and so it is impossible to alienate them."

"Quite right," agreed Appleby.

"Why," the flood-gates opened, Harkness confided his story with the petulance of a spoiled child. "Why, that first evening I was merely civil to her. She sang for us and I praised her voice. What could I have done? I ask you that. Told her the truth? That a cat on the back fence at midnight made sweeter music? I could see him chucking me out neck and crop."

"Quite right," agreed Appleby, once more the professional lawyer.

"She was with us the whole evening, and the

next afternoon I met her by chance and we had a cup of tea together, and she loved me." Harkness' voice broke and he looked on the verge of tears.

Again Appleby patted him kindly on the knee. "Bear up, old chap, he can't get you."

"How could she have loved her husband in the first place," wailed Harkness, "if that was all I had to do to win her affections, take her to tea?"

"Certainly, that is clear," said Appleby. "No jury would find against you. That kind of woman has no affection save for herself. You can easily convince twelve men of that."

"I know," grunted Harkness uncomforted. "But you can't convince twelve women. This all happened in Colorado and the trial will be there and if they have a woman jury it will go against me, Henry, sure as fate. You couldn't convince twelve women that no matter what they think individually, their sex isn't absolutely peerless, that when one of them falls she falls through love, and so if I had her love, her husband could have had it before me."

Appleby nodded. "But, Tom, we can select a jury of young unmarried women—"

"You never can tell with a woman jury," objected Harkness. "You can't argue with them. You can't convince them on a subject on which they have already made up their minds. Don't you see, Henry, I must escape being served. That is my one hope, my one salvation. Why, there isn't a woman in the United States who doesn't consider two hundred thousand cheap for a woman's love. I tell you they would find against me for the whole amount and I don't own any more; to pay that would break me."

He pulled out his handkerchief and dabbed at his eyes pitifully, sitting all hunched together in the shelter of the stone wall. Appleby patted his fat shoulder.

"Now, now, Tom, don't give way like this. Bear up, man. We can win their sympathy—"

"Then the case would go against me sure," moaned Harkness, "because the more they liked me the more firmly convinced they would be that she loved me. Can't you see, Henry, what

a tight place I'm in? Don't you see if I try to fascinate them—"

"Er—don't do that," advised Appleby kindly. "It might be too hard—twelve women, you see," he added quickly.

"I know, but if I did try, and they liked me, it would prove to them that she loved me and the case would go against me, and if they disliked me, they would decide against me anyway."

"It is a hard case," agreed Appleby. "We will get a mixed jury—"

"Then the whole thing would have to be retried, for they would never agree," objected Harkness.

They talked long as they sat in the tall grasses, in the shade of the orchard wall, while the shadows lengthened, and the dusk of coming night approached. At last Appleby rose, saying he must dress for dinner.

"Don't fret, Tom," he urged.

"My first thought was to go abroad," confessed Harkness, rising and wiping his shining brow, "but that day I got auntie's telegram. She has forty millions. I thought I would risk

coming here and she might—er—leave me something."

Appleby nodded. "She will probably be down to-morrow and you can see her then and leave for Europe the day after."

"If I'm not served," said Harkness gloomily.

He decided not to accompany his cousin back to the house through the orchard and pass the stables, lest he be met by the process server, but dodged off along the wall to the distant side of the meadow where he disappeared from sight in the thick bushes, first pausing to turn and wave Appleby a forlorn good-by.

The great house basked contentedly in the slanting rays of the afternoon sun. The western windows were all ablaze as though with their owner's forty millions. Veranda and terrace, lawn and flower garden were deserted. Two robins chattered shrilly in the seclusion of the tree branches, but no voice in laughter or song, no childish treble broke the silence and peace of the place.

Harkness, worn and wary, emerged from a big clump of bushes and assuring himself by a quick glance that no one was in sight, started

hastily across the lawn. He reached the wide stone steps of the terrace in safety and paused a moment to get his breath for the ascent, when around the corner of the portico appeared a tall gaunt figure, woman below and man above. Harkness gave one agonized glance, caught no more than a horrified view of the severely tight, severely plain, extremely unbecoming policeman's coat, took the apparition for a man, and with one dying groan, made a last desperate ineffectual attempt to mount the wide low steps. But even as he struggled forward the woman sprang with awkward agility and grabbed him by the only thing her hands could reach, his coat-tails.

"Halt!" said she.

As it was manifestly physically impossible for Harkness to proceed, he halted.

"Come with me," said the woman in the muffled accents of a fog horn with a cold in its throat. "You must leave these grounds. No stranger is allowed inside the fence."

Harkness drew a breath of relief. Clearly this was no process server. He turned.

"Excuse me," said he, puffing and wiping his

heated brow, "I am Mr. Harkness, Miss Appleby's nephew."

The policewoman was tall and thin, with her hair drawn so tightly back that none of it showed beneath her smart cap.

Harkness glanced into her hard unsexed face. She unbuttoned her natty blouse, put in her hand and drew forth from a breast pocket a note-book and pencil.

"Name, please," said she with the toneless animation of an automaton.

"Harkness, Thomas Harkness," replied that gentleman, still mopping his brow, with one wary eye on the driveway and the distant gate, and yet with a feeling of pleasant security in the gaunt female's mere presence. He realized quite plainly that no process server could reach him now.

"Age?"

"Forty-five," said Harkness. He had been forty-five for the last ten years, so it rolled off his tongue with the readiness of truth.

"Occupation?"

"Watchful waiting," said Harkness, thinking of Miss Appleby and the forty millions.

"Residence?"

"Unfortunately, Denver."

"Denver?" The policewoman paused, pencil suspended, and looked at him. "Denver?"

"Denver," repeated Harkness. "As soon as I can return with safety and pack my apartment house goods, it will be Salt Lake."

It was clear that the officer did not believe that Denver was his residence and equally clear that his facetious remark was to be ignored. She left the space for residence in the book a blank, shut it, snapped the elastic around it and slipped it back into her pocket. Buttoning her blouse, she took Harkness' arm, firmly, unhesitatingly, determinedly.

"Come with me," said she, and led him, dazed and unresisting, toward the distant gateway.

Harkness trotted along beside her in a miserable agony of self-consciousness over the absurdity of the situation; he who had lived all his life in Colorado, being arrested by a policewoman in Connecticut. Maude would see only the glorious emancipation of woman in the incident. Cally would probably burst into tears, and the rest of the women would be more or

less serious and impressed. Vera would see the fun. Her dark eyes would twinkle and her generous mouth would close demurely, but she would be laughing at him all the same. Vera was not yet a feminist, for she still had a sense of humor. Like all little men, Harkness suffered torture when being laughed at. He glanced at the grim creature rolling along beside him and was thankful at least that her skirt was tight, as it enabled his short legs to keep pace easily with her long ones. He did not want to call out for some one to come and identify him because he hated to see them trying not to laugh, and he was certain of being able to convince the officer who he was before they reached the gate. He failed pitifully. His words fell on apparently deaf ears.

At the great iron gate, the woman relaxed her hold on his arm a moment to unlatch and push open the gate and as he waited beside her, coming briskly up the wide, tree-shaded street, Harkness beheld a strange young man, tall and thin, with glasses astride his nose and his hat on the back of his head. In every stranger, Harkness saw a possible process server. He

turned now in a desperate break for liberty, but the policewoman was ready for him. She grabbed him firmly by his fat arm and yanked him around.

"Young man, the gate," said she tersely. "No stranger is permitted in these grounds."

"I am not a stranger," pleaded Harkness. "That man coming may be a process server."

"Better than a spy," said the policewoman grimly, looking down from her lofty height on the poor little red-faced man in such evident distress that any one else would have realized that his anxiety was real and not assumed. The woman police officer, however, was not to be fooled. She knew her job.

The strange young man, with the pleasant face, approached, and Harkness made one more forlorn attempt to escape and was once more firmly seized by the coat-tails and dragged forcibly back. The young stranger sprang quickly through the open gate to the lady's assistance, and taking Harkness by the collar, whirled him around and sent him spinning forward out of the gate with a force sufficient to propel him nearly across the sidewalk where he

lost his balance and fell on his hands and knees on the grass plot bordering the street. But before the stranger could turn again to the lady to offer further assistance, he was himself seized by the arms and violently thrust through the gate which was promptly slammed to behind him.

"No strangers are permitted within these grounds," said the grim voice of the lady he had tried to succor.

In surprise the young man turned and stared for a moment, incapable of speech. Both exhibitions of strength having occurred so rapidly, he hardly realized what had happened. He started to raise his hat, saw the upper effect of the policewoman's garb, thought he was addressing a man and let his hand fall, then he saw the stylish skirt and wondered if he were going mad. Was Vera confined in an insane asylum and was that why Ricky had telegraphed him to come? Was the fat gentleman whom he had so forcibly ejected for the lady's sake, a victim like himself, another Appleby relative lured to this crazy house for some wild scheme?

Harkness picked himself up and the two regarded each other a moment in silence.

"Move on," said the stern voice of the law through the high iron gate.

Sammy Van Fleet raised his hat. "Pardon me—"

"Move on. No strangers are allowed within these grounds."

"I am Van Fleet, Sam Van Fleet—"

"I will give you fifteen minutes to go to the station and leave town. At the end of that time if you are not gone, I shall arrest you."

"I am Harkness," said Harkness, meekly to Sammy, ignoring for a moment the law's ultimatum, "a nephew of Miss Appleby's."

"Oh, yes," said Sammy, shaking hands, while the ominous click of an opening watch could be heard. "I'm Van Fleet. Doubtless you know Vera. Tell me where is she?"

"There," said Harkness quickly, to relieve the youth's distress. "She's all right—"

"Not—er—forcibly confined?"

"Not in this place," said Harkness grimly. "Here we are forcibly ejected."

His eye caught Van Fleet's. For one ago-

nized moment, both strove for self-control. Sammy lost it first. He snickered. Harkness roared, then Van Fleet roared. He leaned against the fence and laughed until he cried. Harkness put a hand on each hip, doubled up, slapped his knees, wept aloud.

For a moment the woman watched them, then the sudden conviction of what a mistake she had made rushed upon her. What would they think of her. Harkness straightened up abruptly and stopped laughing. He had caught the sound of a woman crying. It was pathetic. His kind little heart was touched. He drew near the gate and reaching through the bars, diffidently patted the officer's shoulder.

"There, there," he soothed, "don't do that. It's all right, only a mistake. Here, Sam, shut up. What the deuce are you laughing at?"

Sam was helpless, on the verge of hysterics. He leaned against the fence and his head rolled from side to side. The harder he tried to stop the louder he laughed, peal after peal of senseless laughter, breaking the evening hush of the wide, tree-shaded street, with its pleasant vista of great houses and spreading lawns.

Harkness frowned at him, felt his own lips twitching again and hastily unlatched the now defenseless gate and entered. Gently, his pity sweeping aside his shyness, he took the weeping woman by the arm and led her down a side path to a secluded bower where she could have her cry out. There were a seat and a table in the small evergreen retreat and Harkness pushed her into the seat and then coughed violently as faint and far-away there yet reached him muffled gasps of laughter. The officer put her hand in a manly hip pocket in her skirt, concealed by the length of her blouse, and drawing forth a small square of cambric dabbed at her eyes and sniffed.

"I don't see why I didn't believe you," said she humbly, looking across the table at Harkness, her eyes swollen and wet, her nose red.

"That's all right, that's all right," Harkness assured her, leaning forward to pat her hand. "Any one would have done the same, a common mistake. Really, until I am introduced, no one ever recognizes me."

The woman nodded and felt of her natty cap to be sure it was straight. "You see I had not

seen you. I came about four and Mrs.—Miss Lane, Mrs. Maude—Miss Peters—"

"Mrs. Maude will do," said Harkness. "Of course, I can see how it would happen."

"She said she had showed me all of you—

"Precisely," declared Harkness. "You did quite right."

"You won't tell?"

"I swear I won't."

"But Mr. Van Fleet?"

"I'll fix him so he won't tell either. You wait here."

Harkness found Sammy staggering up the drive like a drunken man, striving for control, but every other minute, going off into paroxysms that made his ribs and jaws ache.

"Hul-l-lo," he gasped as Harkness took him by the arm. "Oh! oh! oh!"

"Don't do that," ordered Harkness sternly, with unwonted dignity. "Give the poor creature a show, Sam. She is mortified to death. If this gets out, I will hold you personally responsible."

"Die first," promised Sammy. "Oh, mama, help me, save me, oh! oh! oh!"

Harkness, satisfied, returned to the weeping maiden in the bower, and Sammy reeled on to the house. Vera had seen him from her window and was on the porch to meet him.

"H—h—ullo," he sputtered.

"Hullo," said Vera, looking down on him as he paused on the bottom step. "Sammy, what *is* the matter?"

Sammy sat down and laughted helplessly into his handkerchief. "I—I—I—lost my hat."

"Here's your hat," said Vera coldly, wondering if he had been drinking and why he had come.

"I—I—know, I—I—got it a—a—again, but the—the—the wind, oh, oh, Vera, it was f—f—funny."

"It must have been," agreed Vera, trying to laugh and deciding that there was something funnier than usual on such an occasion. She had been present several times when Sammy had lost his hat on a gusty day and out of all the pleased crowd which generally gathered to watch appreciatively the pursuit, Sammy seemed the only one who invariably failed to see anything funny about it.

CHAPTER XV

THE DISTRIBUTOR OF MILLIONS

"MISS VARNEY, I am in great—perplexity."

Pretty Mrs. Von Loben Sels paused in the doorway and with her hands clasped before her looked appealingly at the desk where Miss Varney was hastily scribbling a note before dinner. Miss Varney raised her pretty eyes and glanced instinctively at the clock. It was five minutes of seven. Seven was the dinner hour at Appleby House. Her note was personally important and but half finished. With a heroically suppressed sigh, she turned to her duty, her mistress' guest.

"Come and tell me about it," said she, with her charming smile, as she slipped her unfinished note into the desk drawer with one hand and motioned to a near-by chair.

Mrs. Von Loben Sels seated herself gracefully, paused a moment, her delicate brows

knitted, her black eyes on the floor, then she turned suddenly to the secretary and leaning forward, confidingly rested her soft little hand on Miss Varney's.

"I am an artist," said she, by way of beginning.

"How lovely," exclaimed Miss Varney. "Do tell me in what? Music—"

"Painting," interrupted Mrs. Von Loben Sels with a pleased little nod. "I have studied under some of the very best modern instructors."

"How delightful," Miss Varney cooed.

"I never really intended to exhibit any of my work—just the work itself satisfies the soul of an artist." Mrs. Von Loben Sels sighed.

"Indeed it must," agreed her confidante. "I have always longed to be able to create—"

"Ah, it is divine," breathed Mrs. Von Loben Sels, gently squeezing the other's hand. "Until you do, you will never know what true bliss is, the complete soul satisfaction—"

"Indeed, it must be so," interrupted Miss Varney to hasten the confession, one ear on the voices in the hall as the family gathered for dinner, the other waiting for the silvery chimes

of the great clock in the corner. "Your perplexity, I hope, is not about your work."

"It is." Mrs. Von Loben Sels nodded emphatically. "It is, Miss Varney. I never intended to exhibit my work, but urged by my friends, I at last sent a picture to the committee—"

"And it was taken!" cried Miss Varney as joyously as though she really cared.

Mrs. Von Loben Sels nodded a bit grimly. "It was taken. I have received a great deal of praise and I hear that the picture has been hung in the most conspicuous place and called in the catalog the finest example of the modern school."

"How lovely. I must congratu—"

"Wait." Mrs. Von Loben Sels raised her hand. "It seems that the wrong picture was sent to the committee by mistake, not the—er—the one I—er—intended, not the one I painted—"

"Not the one you painted?" stammered Miss Varney. "Dear me, did some one else paint it?"

"My little boy."

"But he is only four."

"I know, but the day I was working on the picture I planned to send to the exhibit, he was playing around near me. I dropped my palette covered with fresh paint. It fell face downward on an extra canvass that happened to be flat on the floor. I tried to pick the palette up, but it stuck and I got a new one. I did not notice what baby was doing, but it seems he managed to drag the palette off, spreading the paint all over the canvas, then he took an old brush and dabbed the colors together. When he was done, he drew my attention to it and to amuse him I set the canvass up with my finished work. I find now that that was the picture the butler crated in my absence and sent to the committee.

"The committee wrote me that it was superb, that as they found I had not named it, they called it *Female Casting a Ballot.*"

"You have written, explaining the mistake?" asked Miss Varney.

Mrs. Von Loben Sels shook her pretty head. "No," said she slowly, "that is what I can not decide. Ought I write, or would it be best to say nothing and leave all in the hands of the committee?" She paused in sweet humility. Was

it for her to question the decisions of that august body? But Miss Varney's glance was not acquiescent. She shook her head, as though in doubt.

"What would you do?" asked Mrs. Von Loben Sels plaintively.

"Oh," protested Miss Varney hastily, "you should consult a wiser person than I."

The door opened and the family straggled in like aimless sheep, looking for Miss Varney as the shepherdess who would provide their evening meal.

"Ask them," suggested Miss Varney quickly, as she rose to the seven melodious chimes of the old-fashioned clock.

"No, no," begged Mrs. Von Loben Sels in a whisper, catching Miss Varney's hand, "no, no, dear Miss Varney."

Miss Varney patted her hand reassuringly as to her own secrecy, and hurried to the door, nodding gaily at the others. In the doorway she paused and turned to them.

"Dinner should be ready," said she. "I am going to see what the trouble is."

She nodded merrily, turned to leave and as quickly turned back again. She stepped ha-

stily into the room, softly closing the door behind her and glancing swiftly over the crowd. Her eyes caught Ricky's and sent him a plea for help; he responded quickly, and reassuringly.

"Dear people," said she in a low hurried voice, her delicate hands clasped, "Miss Appleby is coming down-stairs. She has done this to surprise us."

She paused. No one spoke. Each thought vaguely of that forty million yet to be distributed.

Miss Varney still hesitated and it was plain that she had something more to say. She had become grave and her sweet eyes were full of perplexity, an earnest plea for pardon if she hurt their feelings.

"Dear people," said she again, one hand behind her, reaching for the door-knob, "dear people, she does not—approve of—divorce."

In one last swift glance, her eyes sought Ricky's, then she turned and went quickly out and down the hall, leaving the door open behind her.

The room was very still, seeming to be full

of a painful hush and none cared to look at his neighbor. Miss Appleby, the distributor of forty millions, did not approve of divorce. The announcement was appalling, astounding, hardly believable.

"If she does not approve of divorce, she is very ignorant of the higher ideals of womanhood," said Maude boldly, as a small boy whistles when passing a graveyard at night.

The others nodded feebly.

"Divorce, while no longer a disgrace, is indeed an honor," continued Maude, braver than the others, in the thankful thought that she was not divorced and Great-aunt Appleby could find no fault with her on that score. Forty millions would be a delightful addition to any one's bank account and Maude was as anxious as any of the others as to its ultimate disposal.

There was no time to say more. Miss Appleby appeared in the doorway, Miss Varney beside her. She was a sprightly little woman, with a round, wrinkled face, gentle and kindly. Her white hair was arranged in a charming coiffure, softening the outlines of her face and

counteracting the deep wrinkles of sickness under her eyes and around her mouth. There was a flush of excitement on each old cheek and her eyes were bright. Her short breath and the evident nervous twitching of her hands betrayed how sick she had been and still was.

She entered eagerly in her haste to greet her relatives, a bit in advance of her companion. In the doorway she paused in frank astonishment and glanced around the great room which was full of men and women where she had expected only a few. Could it be a surprise party? Had the neighbors received word that she was coming down that evening—but no, that was silly —no one, not even Miss Varney, knew that she planned to come. Besides, these were strangers and mostly young. Her neighbors were old and wrinkled and sick like herself. She glanced at Miss Varney and laid one hand nervously on the younger woman's arm.

Henry Appleby came forward, his hand out. "Well, auntie," said he gaily, "you don't look a day older than when I saw you last."

The old lady laughed in relief at the sight of

the familiar face. She laid her hand in his and clung to it eagerly.

"How long ago was that, Henry?" she asked.

"That was—let's see—five years ago last fall," answered Henry Appleby, drawing her to him and kissing one wrinkled old cheek.

"I remember," cried the old lady. "May was too sick to come with you, you said."

"She was," said Appleby, and refrained from glancing anywhere save at his aunt. Mrs. Morgan—May—strove not to blush. Seeing her, Miss Appleby dropped Henry's arm and hurried forward.

"And here is May," she cried. "Is not this May?" hesitating, then beamed as Mrs. Morgan kissed her. "I remember you when you were a bride, my child, and Henry brought you down to see me. And now, who is this?" turning to Mrs. Fisher.

Mrs. Fisher, with the density of one who did not belong to the family and was without hope of a share in the forty millions, had not been impressed by the grim warning Miss Varney had given them. She took the old lady's hand

and kissed her, saying gaily, "I feel that through Harold, you are my auntie, too."

"Harold, my dear?" questioned the old lady.

"My husband's little boy," explained Mrs. Fisher, trying to make up to Mrs. Parker for her former mistake by constantly repeating the name of Harold.

"And who is your husband?" asked Miss Appleby, her nervousness increasing with her perplexity, a worried expression creeping into her eyes as she tried to understand.

"Harold Montague Fisher," replied Mrs. Fisher. "Little Harold was named after him, you know."

"And what relation is Harold to me? I can't remember a Fisher in the family."

"Oh, no, Mr. Fisher himself is no relation." Mrs. Fisher was also getting nervous. She felt by the way the others were watching her that she had done something else wrong. The atmosphere had become strained. "No, Harold is your great-nephew on his mother's side."

"But aren't you his mother?" questioned Miss Appleby.

"No, oh, no," protested Mrs. Fisher, floundering helplessly now under the cold glances directed at her, aware that she had blundered, but not sure how.

"Is his mother dead?" asked Miss Appleby in a daze.

"No," Mrs. Alison Drake Fisher Parker could stand it no longer. "I am Harold's mother, aunt."

Miss Appleby turned. "Why, Alison." Meekly she permitted herself to be kissed, and as one stunned she questioned on. "I thought that you had married a Drake—"

"I did, dear," said Mrs. Parker and then remembered the warning, and added quickly, defying, with a magnificent sweep of her dark eyes, any one to contradict her, "I did, but Amos died. I was left a widow and married Mr. Fisher."

"Then you are Mrs. Fisher—"

"No, I am Mrs. Parker."

"Poor child, did your second husband also die?" The old lady was all sympathy.

"Yes," said Alison, in too far now to retreat.

"But then who is this Mrs. Fisher?" In dull despair the old lady's eyes filled with sick tears as she questioned.

"I am his present wife," said Mrs. Fisher coldly, glancing sternly at her other half's one-time better half.

"But he is dead." Miss Appleby was hopelessly confused.

Miss Varney laid her hand on the old lady's shoulder and turned her around, gently but firmly.

"Have you seen Stephen Mayhew, Miss Appleby?" she asked.

"Stephen," cried the old lady, "you were a little boy when my sister brought you to see me."

"I feel like a little boy still," declared Stephen, kissing her.

"And," catching sight of Mrs. Von Loben Sels, "and there is your dear wife."

Mrs. Von Loben Sels pressed her wrinkled cheek.

"Yes," said Stephen, deciding as the others had done on a bold lie if need be, "my wife."

"Sir," the peace of the room was broken by

the stern accents of outraged womanhood as the present Mrs. Mayhew advanced angrily and faced her husband. "Sir, is that woman still your wife? If so, I shall at once start suit for bigamy."

"Bigamy?" Miss Appleby burst into tears.

"Come," said Miss Varney, and gently led her from the room.

CHAPTER XVI

LOVE, THE LEVELER

THERE was a moment of heavy silence as all stared after their departing hostess, then the muffled sobs of the unhappy bride recalled them to the stern pleasures of matrimony. Stephen turned to his wife.

"Mary, Mary, it was only for a short time," he explained, patting her tenderly on the shoulder.

"But—we—have only been married a week," sobbed the broken-hearted one, "and already—you—deny—me!"

"No, no, love. Aunt Appleby disapproves of divorce—"

"If you disapprove of me—I—I—will leave --you—you can get—a—divorce—"

Stephen led the unconsolable gently aside to the great French window and thence to the porch, while the others began to discuss the situation.

"The trouble is," said Freddy Van Tuyl, harassed out of his usual courtesy, "there are too many of us. Only the immediate relatives should be present."

"I think so, too," declared Mrs. Morgan. "I shall leave to-morrow for Reno. Vera can stay on with you, Henry."

"Mother," said Vera, rising and slipping her hand through her mother's arm, "as I said once before, there are to be no more trips to Reno for us."

"Vera," Mrs. Morgan withdrew her arm coldly from her daughter's loving clasp and prepared to make a stand for freedom here in the presence of Maude, the stanch defender of the "faith." "Vera, Mr. Morgan insists on reading his paper at the breakfast table—"

Maude was there, as Mrs. Morgan knew she would be, primed with argument. "A perfect outrage to our womanhood." Tommy wilted, though not addressed. "Would a man read the paper if he were dining with a lady friend?"

"No," agreed Vera, "neither would a man, I hope, go to bed in the presence of a lady friend."

"Vera, how perfectly disgusting," gasped Maude.

Mrs. Von Loben Sels laughed. "Relationship alters cases," she suggested.

"Besides," declared Vera, "a newspaper is sometimes a lot more interesting than a wife."

"That is preposterous," cried Maude.

"But true," sighed Tommy so low that no one heard him.

"A sister wouldn't leave her brother's house because he read the paper at breakfast," pleaded Vera to her mother. "A man and his wife should allow each other the liberty they allow blood relatives."

Sammy stared at his wife in dazed surprise. Could it be possible that Vera contemplated granting him any liberty?

"It isn't liberty to ignore your wife," declared Maude, who needed no assistance in the battle for "Woman's Rights," taking upon her shoulders and carrying to a triumphant conclusion any unfortunate sister's struggles for the new freedom.

"It's wisdom sometimes," said Van Tuyl,

ignorantly reckless because of his unmarried state.

"Mother," demanded Vera, as Maude sailed into the luckless Van Tuyl, "why should Marjory be deprived of a father because he reads his paper instead of talks?"

"I can not talk here," returned her mother coldly, and swept from the room. Vera followed her and the dazed Samuel held open the door for them as one in a dream.

Dinner was a distracted meal. Miss Varney sent down word that Miss Appleby had had a relapse and that neither would be down again that evening. Mrs. Morgan and Vera did not appear either and the others discussed the situation in disjointed nervousness.

"My dear aunt should be made to understand the modern prevalence of divorce," declared Appleby.

"It isn't our fault that women have become polygamous," grumbled Van Tuyl.

Maude was on him at once and the meal ended as disastrously as the discussion in the library, with no plan formed to meet the un-

fortunate principles of the owner and distributor of forty millions. It was clear that they could not keep up the pretense of being married to the particular persons Miss Appleby supposed, when they were not. Nor could they pretend to be widows when their widowers were present, nor yet widowers with their widows there. Mrs. Fisher was grieved beyond consoling by her apparent position of wife to a dead man whose widow was also in the same house.

"We have got to be careful," pleaded Van Tuyl. "She will get mad and cut us all out of that forty millions."

"I have never been divorced," grunted Harkness.

"Nor I," said Van Tuyl. "Then there is Vera and Sammy, a complete couple so far, Nelly and Ricky, Maude and Tommy—"

"I am a complete couple with Mr. Von Loben Sels," said Mrs. Von Loben Sels gently. "Shall I send for him! I can't leave, you know, on account of Stephie. He needs his mother to push his claims."

"Educate auntie," suggested Appleby again.

"No, sir," cried Van Tuyl, "not when we may lose forty millions doing it."

"No," seconded Harkness. "When she found how easy divorce is, she would get married for the experience, and divorced for the relief."

"Relief? From whom, pray?" Maude's icy accents cleaved the atmosphere.

Nelly slipped from the room indifferent to what followed and to the forty millions. When all one's thoughts are occupied with the miserable numb sickness of finding that one's love is not what one thought him, how can one think of forty millions! Forty million—kisses? Yes, ah, yes, forty times forty millions. But mere dollars, mere round senseless metal? No, no! Nothing doing.

The evening was calm and beautiful. The sun had set and the last flicker of daylight had turned into the pale dusk of night. Over the tree-tops a star shone like a beacon of hope. Nelly paused on the porch steps and even in her misery thought to whisper softly:

"Star light,
Star bright,

First star I've seen to-night,
I wish I may,
I wish I might,
Have the wish I wish to-night."

Three times she repeated it as the formula commands, and then with renewed hope, for she knew not what, her only wish having been a vague one, expansive, inclusive, that all would yet be well, she ran lightly down the steps and the path to the sweet seclusion of the flower garden.

The twilight died and the darkness deepened as she mused, curled up on the rustic bench by the sun-dial. The stars multiplied overhead and a breeze arose, whispering in the tree-tops and bringing sweet, unnamable spring odors from the fields and hedge rows. Once the small gate clicked and a couple came slowly down the walk, indistinguishable in the darkness, save that one was a woman in clinging white and the other a man. They hesitated a moment on finding their retreat occupied then passed on and out of the farther gate. Nelly watched them, indifferent as to their identity, envious

of their apparent equality. They could love each other and take pride in the love, for one was not forced to stoop. Then she flushed in the darkness for her own miserable snobbery and knew at the same time that she could not help it. Small refinements, little courtesies, superficial perhaps in the grim realities of life, yet they made up her world and were as much a part of her as her hair, her eyes, her delicate white hands. Though her heart cried out in an agony of denial, she knew that in the end, when put to the test, she would never have to present Mrs. Rubenstein to her friends as her mother-in-law.

Once more the gate opened and some one came down the walk, a man, alone, tall and thin. In the darkness, able only to see his vague outline, yet she knew him. Her heart seemed to stop. She told herself fiercely that he was not the man she had thought him, he was not just, that she should be disgusted with him for having one law for one and another law for another, that she *was* disgusted, and all the time her lips twitched with an uncontrollable desire to smile her glad foolish welcome. Slowly he

came down the walk and she watched him, watched his well-shaped head, his broad shoulders, his long graceful stride. Then suddenly he saw her white dress. He hesitated as though about to retreat, but finally came forward. She turned her head as he approached and would not look at him as she strove to control her mutinous lips.

"Nelly."

He stood before her, looking down on her, one hand in his pocket. She tried not to meet his eyes, but in spite of herself, she raised her head and faced him. For a moment they stared at each other, temples throbbing, hearts beating. Then his hands were on her shoulders, he had dragged her roughly, fiercely, to her feet and his arms were around her, crushing her to him.

"Nelly, Nelly," he whispered and could find wits to say no more, he who swayed crowds by the eloquence of his glib tongue, by the fire of his rushing voice.

Nelly's arms were around his neck and in the relief from the long strain of trying to be dis-

gusted with him, she wept in ecstatic joy on the breast of his workman's flannel blouse; he, the fourth assistant gardener, she the niece of Miss Appleby and her forty millions.

CHAPTER XVII

TOO MUCH FOR AUNT APPLEBY

"YES," said Van Tuyl, "I am trying to start an innovation." He paused impressively and glanced around the library where all the guests were again assembled waiting the luncheon bell.

It seemed to Miss Varney's harassed intellect that all they ever did was eating or waiting to eat. She had confided as much to Ricky the night before when they had strolled down the path to the flower garden and found their retreat occupied.

"I know," sympathized Ricky, "but eating is the foundation of the world's commerce. You can't take a mouthful without being the direct cause of some poor devil's earning a living."

"What is the innovation?" asked Vera, who had just entered with her father. They had been for a walk which Vera had thoroughly enjoyed, surprised that she found her father

so satisfying when neither had said a dozen words and those words were monosyllables of the most delightful bromidic common sense.

"We have women police men," said Van Tuyl.

Sammy snickered. Van Tuyl frowned. His young kinsman seemed to have a peculiar sense of humor he had noticed, laughing in sudden bursts, quickly suppressed, at nothing as far as the others could see.

"Women police men," went on Van Tuyl, ignoring Sammy. "Women doctors, lawyers, gardeners, farmers, stenographers, bookkeepers. Now what I plan to have *The Voice of the People* advocate is a still wider field for women. Why limit their powers?"

He glanced around but forbore to look at Maude.

"Who does?" asked Appleby.

"What wider field do you advocate?" asked Mrs. Bingham. "Art?"

"Women are already masters of art," said Maude coolly. "As I have explained to Cally, why, because she is a mother, should that prevent her from painting a great picture or writing a deathless poem?"

All turned and looked at Cally, poor little, humdrum, rather stupid Cally, and the idea of her writing a great poem would have been comic if it wasn't rather pitiful. Cally burst into tears.

"Cally, my dear," soothed Mrs. Morgan, "what *is* the trouble?"

"She's all broken down from overwork and nervousness," said Vera gently.

"Maude—Maude expects so much from me," sobbed Cally. "I—I—haven't the ability."

Mrs. Von Loben Sels, blushing delightfully, refused to be turned from the subject of art. "I suppose you have heard of my picture," said she, modestly, turning to Van Tuyl.

Cally was forgotten.

"Your picture?" rose the excited clamor.

Mrs. Von Loben Sels blushed still more delightfully. "*Female Casting a Ballot,*" said she with a deprecating little gesture as though she had really done nothing worth mentioning. "I suggested that they call it *Sunset From the Palisades,* but they decided that that was not prosaic enough."

"Hung?" demanded Maude.

"Accepted and most favorably hung," smiled Mrs. Von Loben Sels.

"How perfectly to be expected," cried Maude, feeling that the entire feminine sex had had a hand in the painting. "I shall go at once and see it. How beautiful, how poetic, how realistic, *Female Casting a Ballot.*"

"Of course," said Mrs. Von Loben Sels, "there have been other women painters, Freddy. There was Rosa Bonheur, for instance."

"No," said Van Tuyl, "I was not thinking of art. Women have conquered that field as they have the masculine field. I shall advocate women mothers. Think of the boundless opportunity for good a woman can have in the home."

"Back to the home," suggested Sammy and laughed, more than his wit seemed to call for. Van Tuyl frowned again. A serious movement should not be treated with levity.

"Still thinking of his straw hat," thought Vera, smiling at her husband.

Harkness looked at him coldly, sternly, and Sammy's snicker died in a muffled cough.

Miss Varney, charmingly flushed, entered hastily.

"Dear people," she said, pausing in the doorway, one hand on the back of a chair, "I have tried to explain to Miss Appleby that divorce is merely a higher demonstration of American liberty. Why be bound by even the marriage ties? I have showed her the folly of trying to live with a person of whom you have wearied. The foolish notion of limiting romance to youth and unmarried people. Why grow too old to flirt? The more we get married, the more we want to get married."

"I hope you explained that when a man has killed a woman's love to continue to be his wife is prostitution," said Mrs. Morgan with a prolonged sigh and a glance at Vera of mingled reproach and forgiveness.

Miss Varney nodded. "Yes, I did, indeed. Why live with one man when you want to live with another?"

"What did she say?" asked Appleby anxiously.

Miss Varney smiled like a child conscious of well-doing. "I think I made her realize a little

anyway, that the times have changed since she was young and the ideal was married felicity. She admitted that she knew things have changed. I want her to meet you all again and hope I can persuade her to look on marriage as a temporary enjoyment instead of a permanent annoyance." Miss Varney nodded, smiled, and hesitated a moment as though seeking a tactful way to express herself further. "While she tries to understand," she said at last, "naturally it is rather difficult for her to get our point of view. So—maybe—just at first—if you will each limit youself to one divorce and, possibly, a separation, it may be best."

Once more she nodded, smiled encouragement and paused to allow one of the others to make a suggestion.

"Suppose we don't mention marriage or remarriage, if possible," suggested Van Tuyl. "Auntie is old and there is no need to prejudice her."

"No more at least than we have to," said Appleby gloomily. "How *is* auntie, Miss Varney?"

Miss Varney looked grave. "She was very much up—"

The door opened and on the threshold stood the old lady, smiling, half fearfully, wholly timidly, from one to the other. It was clear with one glance that she was not so well as the night before. She was still shaken from her experience and under a nervous strain. She had great rings beneath her eyes, her cheeks were white and flabby and the hand that she laid on Miss Varney's arm trembled.

Appleby came forward at once and kissed her. "Well, auntie, how's the old lady?" he asked jovially.

Miss Appleby smiled. "I want to meet all of you," she said. "It is so long since I have seen any of you and especially the children. Where is Harold?"

Mrs. Fisher blushed and looked guiltily at Mrs. Alison Drake Fisher Parker. No one answered. Mrs. Parker was wondering if Jimmy were worthy under the circumstances of impersonating Harold. Mrs. Fisher, realizing that all blame for the situation was hers, for-

bore to take any more active part in the proceedings than need be.

Miss Appleby looked at Mrs. Parker. "Alison, dear, you are Harold's mother, are you not?" she asked gently.

"Yes, dear aunt," replied Mrs. Parker, struggling to make up her mind whether to send for Jimmy or not. Jimmy looked a great deal like Mr. Fisher and so did Harold. Besides, Jimmy was a dear little boy and she had been very fond of him when she had been his mother.

"Did you leave him home, dear child?" asked the old lady with evident disappointment at the thought of not seeing her grand-nephew.

And like another, more historical but hardly more heroic character, Mrs. Parker could not lie. "Dear aunt," said she gently, "Harold is not here. Mrs. Fisher did not bring him."

"Hush," whispered Appleby too late.

"Don't complicate matters," pleaded Van Tuyl of Mrs. Fisher, reducing that lady at once to a nervous wreck. She felt the eyes of all to be upon her and in her intense eagerness to be

of help, to rectify that first fatal blunder, to do as Van Tuyl requested and not complicate matters, she spoke the confusing truth.

"I made a mistake, Miss Appleby, and brought Jimmy instead of Harold."

It was plain to all that Miss Appleby was trying hard to understand, not to be old-fashioned and primitive. She moistened her lips with her tongue and asked still gently:

"And who is Jimmy?"

"One divorce and a separation," whispered Harkness hoarsely.

"Jimmy is Mr. Fisher's child by his first wife," said Mrs. Fisher, desperately, clinging to the truth as a penniless man clings to his job.

"One divorce and a separation," pleaded Harkness again, in a low tense voice not intended for the old lady.

"He was divorced from his first wife and separated from his second," said Mrs. Fisher, not clear now what she was saying and driven to falsehood by the strained encouragement on the faces around her.

"Dear aunt," said Van Tuyl hastily, "my

paper, *The Voice of the People,* is going to institute a nation-wide movement of back to the home—"

Cally burst into tears.

The old lady turned and saw her for the first time. "My dear, my dear," she pleaded in as evident distress as Cally, "what is the trouble?"

"B-b-back to the h-h-ome," sobbed Cally.

"Poor child, so very homesick?" asked Miss Appleby, all compassion, but visibly growing more nervous. Her cheeks had crimson spots on them and her hands trembled hopelessly as she sought to stroke Cally's pale brown hair. "You should not have come to see a foolish old woman like me, child."

"I—I—was glad to come," wept Cally. "My—my boss spits."

"Your husband, love?"

"M—my boss."

"Cally works in an office, dear aunt," explained Maude.

"Dear, dear," the old lady was all crooning tenderness. "Are you so poor, you brave young thing?"

"Oh, they have plenty of money," elucidated Maude. "But Cally, dear aunt, refuses to be a parasite."

"A parasite?" the old lady was reduced to repetition.

As in the unfortunate conversation about Jimmy and Harold, Van Tuyl once more sought to create a diversion. "The motto for my return movement," said he cheerfully, "will be 'Better be a parasite than a sight.'"

"And who, pray, *is* a 'sight' in your estimation?" demanded Maude, insulted womanhood refusing to be silent even with the possibility of losing a share in the forty million.

The old lady's hand rose in a nervous flutter to her trembling lips as she gazed from one to another, clearly on the verge of tears herself.

"Maude," pleaded Appleby. "Please, Freddy meant no harm. We are upsetting aunt."

"I can not help it, Henry," returned Maude. "Does Freddy infer that Cally is a sight? Cally, a noble woman, absolutely independent, standing shoulder to shoulder with men—"

"Boys—office boys," sobbed Cally. "I—I—

I'm not a man, Maude, though I try to be. I—I—can't compete with them."

"You certainly can," contradicted Maude sternly. "Why should your sex prevent you from doing precisely what men do—"

"But, my dear, why want to do what men do?" asked Miss Appleby humbly, a meek seeker of the light.

"Everybody," begged Harkness, "pray be calm."

"Dearest aunt," said Appleby, heroically trying to launch a new topic of conversation, "we have with us a famous painter," and he turned and bowed to Mrs. Von Loben Sels.

"I would like to see some of your work, dear," said the old lady, holding out her hand. "Stephie must be proud of you." Then she remembered that Stephen was no longer Mrs. Von Loben Sels' husband and paused, blushing painfully for having wounded the young thing's feelings by such a clumsy reference to her disgrace, the divorce.

Mrs. Von Loben Sels blushed herself. Stephie to her meant no one but Stephen, Junior. Could

it be that the old lady knew that he had manufactured the picture? Was she ironical?

Stephen felt his bride's cold glance upon him and forbore to open his mouth. Once more Van Tuyl felt the strain in the atmosphere and sought to remedy it.

"Dear aunt," he began, when the door opened unceremoniously and a stranger appeared on the threshold.

He was a tall thin man, shabby and hungry looking. In his hand he held a folded paper. In just two bounds, Harkness was out of the French window, making for the flower garden. Mrs. Bingham, with an undignified shriek, slipped through a door that led into a small reference room, but which she thought led to the hall and escape. The stranger took one step after her, when Miss Appleby, tense, white-faced, stood before him, her old head up.

"Sir," said she coldly, pointing to the door, "leave my house."

"Yes, ma'am, but first I must speak to that lady." And the stranger tried courteously to pass.

Miss Appleby stood her ground. "That lady,

sir, is my niece and has no business, no business whatever, with you." There was boundless scorn for him in the sweet old voice. "Leave my house or I shall have you put out."

The stranger threw back his coat and revealed a policeman's badge. "Very well, ma'am, as you won't let me arrest her, I arrest you instead for preventing an officer of the law from performing his duty."

The old lady's eyes blazed, her pointing finger trembled with outraged dignity. "Leave my house before I order my servants to put you out," said she.

The stranger laid his hand diffidently on her shoulder. "Miss Appleby, I have no other course open before me but to arrest you," said he.

"My aunt is too ill to be bothered," said Van Tuyl genially, stepping forward. "Come with me. I think we can fix it up." He slipped his hand through the shabby stranger's arm and led him from the room, jovially, but firmly.

The door closed. Miss Appleby stood a moment staring after them, trembling from head to foot, then she sank into a chair and

began to cry, the pitiful strangling sobs of aged grief. "Think of the disgrace, the disgrace," she moaned. "Arrested, sent to prison, Cynthia Appleby arrested and sent to prison—"

"Dearest aunt," pleaded Appleby, "don't let it affect you so. Pray calm yourself. To go to prison nowadays is no disgrace. All our best people go. Simply write about your experience when you come out, describe the brutality of the jailers for treating you like a prisoner, the terrible injustice of keeping dishonest men locked up for the sake of decent society. Believe me, dearest aunt, in that way prison is no disgrace."

Miss Appleby sobbed on.

Mrs. Bingham like a trapped animal peered cautiously forth from her unfortunate cul-de-sac. "Is he gone?" she whispered.

"Yes," said some one.

She emerged, wringing her hands. "Did he see the children?"

"What has become of the policewoman?" asked Maude, who having recommended her presence felt anxiously responsible for her proficiency.

"She could not stop an officer of the law," said Ricky. "He had come to arrest you, Clara. The children have probably been seen and recognized."

"But why should he arrest Clara?" demanded the old lady between her sobs. "I and my niece, disgraced, disgraced."

"Dearest aunt," begged Appleby. "Please, please."

"What has Clara done?" sobbed the old lady.

"She kidnaped her children—"

"Her children? Her own children?" Miss Appleby rose blindly and held out her hand to Miss Varney. "Take me away," she sobbed. "Take me away."

CHAPTER XVIII

LEAVING ALL SHE HAD

GLOOM impenetrable had settled over the house.

"We make an unfortunate impression," said Appleby sorrowfully.

Harkness came in late. He had not been seen since his abrupt departure on the entrance of the stranger. Appleby had been the only one to miss him and to wonder if he were still running.

The latched gate of the flower garden, for the seclusion of whose high hedge Harkness had aimed in his flight, had brought him to a momentary and agonized halt. In spite of his three hundred pounds, he had descended the piazza steps and negotiated the distance between the house and the garden with the agility of a mountain goat. But there his breath had left him and he grasped the gate, puffing, gasping, exhausted, only capable of clinging

to the top bar and struggling to breathe again, that he might reach through and loosen the latch. In tortured suspense, he clung there, conscious that he was still in full view of the house. Then some one reached forth suddenly and unlatched the gate and Harkness stumbled into the seclusion of the hedge and the presence of the policewoman. As the gate swung open, his one thought had been to get out of sight, and forgetful of his manners and of the gratitude he owed his liberator, he pushed by her, stepped over a few intervening flower beds and paused only when sure that he was completely concealed from the house. Then he leaned against the hedge, puffing and panting. The policewoman, tall, gaunt, stern, had followed him and now stood grimly before him, waiting until he was himself again.

"Much—much—bliged," panted Harkness, "opening—gate. I was out for a stroll. Beaut—beautiful here—in—in seclusion—flowers—" He mopped his streaming forehead and strove to appear at ease.

"Yes," said the policewoman, unmoved by the beauty of nature, "here are some papers—"

"Oh, lord!" The bitter irony of it bit into Harkness' soul. He could endure no more. He doubled up like an overfat jackknife and sank in a heap on the already ruined flower bed, half disappearing in the kindly branches of the hedge.

The policewoman was undismayed. Calmly, she took two or three rolling steps to an empty flower pot, returned with it, inverted it and sat down on it. "I thought you would like to see the papers—they have something to do with you and a divorce case—before I tore them."

"Tore them up?" Harkness half out of sight in his sudden collapse in the hedge was only capable of a faint repetition.

"Yes," said the policewoman. "You would be sure then that they were destroyed."

"Destroyed?" Harkness sank still farther into the friendly branches of the hedge and feebly wiped his beaded brow.

"Yes," said the policewoman once again. "The man brought them up to the house this morning. I asked him his business. He explained, process server. I told him that I was

an officer of the law, that I would serve the summons. For him to leave the papers. He said it was a great help, he had been trying to serve you for weeks—"

"Months—years—centuries," mumbled a broken voice from the hedge.

"Three weeks, he said," corrected the policewoman. "He gave me the papers and left. Here they are. Do you wish to read them to be sure—"

"No, no. No, no," pleaded Harkness. "I never want to see them, never," and he covered his eyes with his little fat hands.

"I have read them," said the policewoman. "I will now tear them up."

The blessed sound of tearing paper penetrated the branches of the hedge. Harkness in a daze, listened, then slowly struggled out to a more upright sitting position, and finally scrambled to his knees, the better to watch the glorious work of mutilation, his round fat face suffused with joy.

When the last two-inch scrap had been reduced to two one-inch pieces, he caught the woman's hand and bending his head kissed it

where it rested on her knee. The woman's eyes brightened, her gaunt face flushed and she turned her head, withdrawing her hands to feel nervously of her hair, tightly drawn back, wholly invisible beneath the visor of her unbecoming cap.

"Thomas," said she softly.

But Harkness did not hear. He was carried away with joy. "Woman," he cried, gathering up the scraps in glad haste, "woman, you have saved my fortune."

He made a hole in the soft dirt of the flower bed and together they tumbled all the scraps in and covered them up. The woman rose, lifted the inverted flower pot she had been sitting on and placed it firmly on the new-made grave of duty-not-done, law-and-order-foiled. Then she sat down again and Harkness, still kneeling, hunched back on his heels and looked at her, such a feeling of peace and security in her protecting presence rushing over him, that for a moment he could not find voice to speak. Then his first remark was to question his happiness as do all poor mortals.

"Why did you do it?" he asked humbly.

"It was against the law and you are an officer of the law."

The woman shrugged that minor fact aside, like all women, cheerfully ready to break the law into a thousand pieces to give happiness to one she cares for. Every woman, where her heart is concerned, makes her own laws.

"I thought that this delay would give you time to get away," she explained. "It will be at least two weeks before they discover that you have not been served and send on new papers. Before then, your visit here will be over and you will have time to go abroad for a while."

"But—but—why did you do it for—me?" stammered Harkness.

"I—wanted to help—you," said the policewoman and again averted her eyes and felt vaguely of her hair.

Harkness found another empty flower pot and inverted it beside the policewoman's and all the afternoon, they sat in the sweet seclusion of the flower garden, in the shelter of the protecting hedge, and talked, while the soft May day drifted toward night, even as the

little white clouds drifted by in the deep blue overhead. And the woman forgot her patrol duty and the man, Miss Appleby and her forty millions.

At dinner, Harkness was vaguely aware of the gloom that engulfed the others and made the meal a sad depressing affair, but it was not until Henry Appleby remarked that he believed Miss Appleby had consulted her lawyer that afternoon, that he was brought to a full realization of the seriousness of the occasion.

All glanced anxiously at Appleby. Miss Varney was not present, having sent down word that she could not leave her mistress.

"An unfortunate time to make a will," said Stephen gloomily, and added, slowly, "for us."

"I am afraid it was her will," said Appleby solemnly. "The butler was called up-stairs to sign some papers—"

The curtain at the wide doorway was drawn slowly back and Miss Varney appeared. She was still in the trim white suit she had worn at luncheon. Her face was drawn and tired and she clung to the curtain as though for support. Across the width of the room her

eyes sought Ricky's and something in her glance brought him to his feet, napkin in hand. An ominous hush fell on the room as all turned in surprise to the girl.

"Dear people," said she slowly, "I have been with Miss Appleby all the afternoon, until about half an hour ago when I withdrew to the small sitting-room to have my supper. She had been sleeping quietly for over two hours when I left her. Mrs. Mainwaring had also gone to get her supper. I was up-stairs alone." She paused. All knew what was coming, but no one spoke or moved. "Suddenly, I heard an odd sound in the bedroom—I had left the door open in case she wanted me. It sounded as if some one was trying to get his breath. I hurried in. Miss Appleby was lying very still on her left side. Even before I reached her, I saw that she had just died, very quietly, quite painlessly."

CHAPTER XIX

WHO IS THE HEIR

"POOR old lady," sighed Van Tuyl, the first to break the silence that had settled upon the room after the departure of Miss Varney and Henry Appleby, who as the oldest male relative had taken charge of affairs by the common consent of all save Maude who wanted to know why, simply because he was a man, he should take charge. No one cared to argue the point and the subject was dropped.

They murmured conventional condolence to one another, but no one mentioned what was uppermost in the minds of all. Had dear Aunt Appleby died intestate, or was Henry right when he said that she had disposed of her forty millions that afternoon? Forty millions! Who was to inherit it? This thought, haunting, glorious, ghastly in its magnificent possibilities, was not to be denied or crushed out.

She had never had more to do with any of them than courtesy and relationship required. None had seen her for years and some of the younger ones, not at all until that memorable visit. To pretend that her death was a personal loss to any of them would have been inexcusable hypocrisy. To be indifferent in one's thoughts as to the ultimate disposal of the forty millions which each of them stood a good chance to fall heir to, was impossible. But no one mentioned the will. All murmured gentle things to one another about the dead and all hoped and yet feared, planned and tried not to plan, about that forty millions.

Van Tuyl voiced the fear that was in all their hearts. "I am afraid," said he, "that Aunt Appleby did not understand us."

"And it's too late now," sighed Stephen.

"Poor old lady," they all chorused, hastily.

"She was so terribly upset at the thought of being arrested," said Mrs. Bingham. "I feel in a way that that shock was my fault."

"No, no," the others protested kindly.

"I did my best not to allow any strange man to enter the grounds," agreed Mrs. Bingham,

consenting to be comforted. "I am so afraid their father will take the children from me—"

"That comes—" began Maude.

"Maude," begged Van Tuyl, with feeling, raising his hand, "let us remember that death has entered this house, and let us have peace."

Everybody broke into talk at once on a variety of subjects "to head off" Maude.

"The funeral will probably be day after tomorrow," said Harkness.

"And the will read directly afterward," said Stephen, speaking his mind without regard to what he said in his haste to change the subject. There was a sudden silence. The will!

"There may be no will," murmured Van Tuyl. "Poor old lady!"

"In that case, we all share," said Stephen, and added, delicately, as Van Tuyl did, "poor old lady!"

"Of course, we will all stay for the funeral," said Van Tuyl.

"Of course," agreed the others.

Nelly slipped her arm through Maude's and drew her aside as all left the room. "Maude,"

said she, "would you like to go with me and listen to some speeches?"

"Where?" asked Maude.

Nelly explained. "On the corner of Main Street. The Union of 'Amalgamated Button Mold Operators' is going to make speeches about the strike that is coming and they want to get the Associated Brotherhood of Button Stampers to go out with them."

Maude looked at her slim young cousin in surprise. "Indeed, Nelly," she declared, "I would love to go. Tommy can take us in the car—but I didn't know that you went in for this sort of thing."

"Oh, yes," said Nelly, and blushed a beautiful delicate pink. "I have become interested in the—the Working Man."

"I am glad of that," said Maude. "It is a shame when you think what those people have to endure. Positively, I know it for a fact, some of them don't get more than fifteen dollars a week."

"Oh, yes," said Nelly. "It is—terrible," and she thought of the contentment and peace that

pervaded the Rubensteins' home and knew that she was in her heart a traitor to Reuben's cause, the holy Cause of Labor, and knowing which, was only the more tender to Reuben.

Ricky refused all invitations to join the party, and after tucking Nelly in the car, stood a moment on the steps watching it disappear down the drive. Then as he turned with a sigh to reenter the house he saw Miss Varney coming down the wide, dimly lighted hall toward him. She was very white and frankly, adorably, tired, but she smiled as she saw him and came eagerly forward.

"I was looking for you," she said, laying her hand on his arm. "Can't we go somewhere—I must—I feel that it would be no breach of faith, would do no harm, to tell you—something."

"Only tell me that you love me," cried Ricky, forgetting everything, as he laid his hand passionately on the one that rested on his arm, and looked down into her beautiful eyes.

She drew back, confused, lovely. "Ah, no," she cried. "Nelly—"

"I know, dear," he persisted, still clinging

to her hand and taking a step after her as she retreated. "But nowadays, it's no dishonor to love another woman than your wife. Divorces are easy. Nelly is a sweet little thing, but you are my queen, my ideal—"

"Hush, hush," protested the girl, her eyes filling with tears. "Please, not to-night."

"I'm a brute," cried Ricky, kissing her hand gently, reverently. "I ought to be kicked, bothering you when you are so tired."

"I *am* tired," she admitted, "but I wanted to tell you—" She paused.

"Don't tell me to-night," said Ricky softly. "You are too tired. Go to bed and tell me in the morning."

"No," she insisted, "I must tell you now. I am sure it will do no harm, won't be a breach of faith—"

"Nothing you do could be that," swore Ricky.

She smiled, shaking her head, and sitting down on the stairs to which they had slowly retreated, made room for him on the step beside her. "Miss Appleby did not ask me not to mention it and it seems a shame not to—er—put you all out of your—er—"

"Agony," suggested Ricky cheerfully, who being only an in-law had never had any hope of a share in the forty millions and could discuss its disposal in impersonal good-nature.

"Suspense," corrected Miss Varney. "Miss Appleby made her will this afternoon." Again she paused and looked at him to see what effect the announcement would have on him.

But Ricky was unimpressed. He nodded. "Appleby said he thought she had."

"Yes, she made it and I heard whom she made the—heir."

"Jove," said Ricky. "Forty millions is some pile! Who's the lucky rascal? Not me?" with just a faint, far-off, absurd hope that the impossible might have happened.

Miss Varney shook her head. "I should have said that I do not know just exactly who the heir is, but I know that it is—none of the—family." She spoke softly, as one does when breaking bad news.

Ricky's laugh at his own foolish hope reassured her and she went on. "She had an argument with the lawyer. He wanted her to leave it in the family. She said the family

would be disgraced to inherit it. It was tainted money. She was a convict."

"Poor old lady, by jove, that's pitiful!"

Miss Varney nodded again, her eyes filling with tears. "It was pitiful, she was so mortified, so ashamed. Poor old lady!"

"I suppose she left it to charity," suggested Ricky.

"No. She said no charity would accept it when it was known she died practically in prison. She thought she was going there, you know."

"Jove," said Ricky, "she didn't know charity any better than she knew us. Did she throw it away?"

"No. I was called from the room before she named the person, but she has left it all, every cent, to one of the servants in the house."

"Jove," gasped Ricky, "maybe it's the—butler?"

"I don't know, I missed the name." Miss Varney sighed.

"Maybe—" Ricky paused. "Maybe—it's—you." And he looked at her with growing awe and admiration. Money could make her no

more desirable, he told himself, and he cared no more for money than the usual run of humanity, yet the thought that she might possibly be sole heir to forty millions threw an added attraction, rather awe-inspiring, around her.

The girl rose, smiling a denial that was belied by the unconscious and unconquerable hope in her tired eyes. "No, I am afraid not," she said. "I must go, now. Good night."

"Good night," replied Ricky soberly, and as he watched her mount the stairs, he wondered what she would do with forty millions.

CHAPTER XX

EVERYBODY SUSPECTED

ANNA, the maid, slammed a dish of corn-meal mush in front of Appleby, a dish he particularly hated.

"There's your mush," said she sternly, as Appleby peered in surprise at the soft yellow concoction. "Cook was mad."

"My good girl," said Appleby. "You have made a mistake—"

"Cake?" shrilled the girl. "Hot cakes?"

Appleby raised his voice. "Mistake. I said you have made a mistake. I do not care for mush."

Anna tossed her head. "You said you wanted some mush and I had cook make it special."

"No, no," protested Appleby. "I said hash, corn beef hash."

Anna jerked away the offending dish. "You *said* mush," she declared angrily.

"Oh, Anna," said Ricky loudly, smiling gaily at the girl, "will you be so kind as to bring me some toast?"

"Eh?" demanded the girl.

"Toast," repeated Ricky, slowly and distinctly. "Toast. Thank you."

Anna, somewhat softened by masculine friendliness, nodded and left the room.

"Dear, dear," said Appleby. "Why did the Lord make ears, if we have to be deaf?"

"Anna is stupid, too, I think," declared Mrs. Morgan.

"I know," agreed Ricky, "But every time I look at her, by jove, I can't help wondering if she's the heir."

"Has the shock last night upset you, Ricky?" asked Van Tuyl as the others stared.

It was breakfast time, but Miss Varney had not appeared and Ricky felt that she had remained away to give him an opportunity to break the news to the assembled family. He explained what he meant. There was a moment of horrified silence, then a prolonged sigh.

"By jove," said Van Tuyl, after a bit, his

voice grim with awe, "suppose it is the butler?"

"I think it is," said Mrs. Morgan. "He has a very fine face."

"It may be Anna," said Ricky. "She is deaf, you know, and Aunt Appleby was sorry for her."

"Forty millions," sighed Harkness.

Cally burst into tears.

"My child," expostulated Mrs. Morgan with the weary tenderness of ceaseless repetition, "what *is* the trouble?"

"I—I—had hoped she—she would leave me enough to be—eco—nomically in—de—pendent," sobbed Cally. "I—I am so tired of typewriting."

"It is a shame," declared Maude. "If she had only left you some, you could join me in promoting the study of Greek postures for shop girls."

"I want to go h—h—ome and stay h—h—ome," sobbed Cally.

"My dear," said Maude encouragingly, "think of the noble example set us by the birds—"

"Maude, for goodness' sake, why birds?" demanded Mrs. Von Loben Sels. All were more or less upset. When nerves have been frayed by the fact that forty millions have just been willed out of the family, a weeping woman does not add to the general feeling of joy.

"Apparently," said Maude coldly, "you have not kept abreast of the literature of the day. Birds are the highest form of civilization—"

"Pigs," interrupted Appleby, "are the highest form. They have no appendices. We should, therefore, model our lives on pigs—"

"I suppose you mean me," said Harkness angrily, finishing his third bowl of mush.

"It may possibly be the chambermaid," said Mrs. Bingham suddenly.

Recalled to the forty millions, every one sighed, dismally, but before they could agree or disagree, Anna entered with Ricky's toast.

"Oh, Anna," screamed Appleby, staring at the girl in fascinated wonder if it could be possible that she was the heir to forty millions, "oh, Anna, I believe I forgot to thank you for having cook make me that mush—"

Anna stared in frozen disgust.

"*Ach,* mush," she shrilled angrily, "you said you didn't want no mush—"

Appleby hastened to explain. "No, no. I was just thanking you—"

"Thanking me, for what?"

"For the mush—"

"But you said you didn't want no mush."

All strove to explain at once. Who knew but in three short days, this beautiful room, the exquisite table linen and priceless old silver might belong to this deaf girl?

Nelly rose and slipped out. The ceaseless uproar, as it seemed to her, was all so useless. In a secluded corner of the flower garden, she came upon Reuben down on his knees, tenderly setting out some lily-bulbs.

"I have to do this where the Union can't see me," he explained, falling back on his heels to look up at her.

Nelly nodded and sat down on an empty box. "Has Mr. Murphy finished your window?" she asked.

The morning was warm and cloudless. The freshly turned earth in the flower bed was still a rich brown, damp and odorous, mingling

with the scent of the lilacs. In the heavy tree branches, the birds chatted and Nelly, glancing up into the deep green, wondered vaguely if they had unions, or had they passed beyond the union stage.

"No," answered Reuben. "The Union found out about it and wouldn't let him do it. You see he is only allowed to put in glass, though he is a good, all-round carpenter, but the Union only lets each man do one thing."

"Why can't the man do what he wants?"

"Oh, no," said Reuben. "If each man did all he could, there wouldn't be enough work to go round. So we couldn't have the window. It cost too much to have five men, each doing one thing and getting a day's pay for it."

Nelly nodded. She was out of sorts. All the world was crooked that morning and her temper with it. Reuben gazed at her tenderly, reading her mood, while the look of a wounded dog crept into his eyes, because she was cross. He picked up the trowel and dug a few moments. Nelly watched him, her irritation being soothed, the crooked made straight, just because she was with him.

"If I had plenty of money," said Reuben, pausing in his work, "you would like me better."

Nelly blushed a deep crimson, knowing that she could not like him any more than she did, but that if he had money, she would not be ashamed because she did like him. He was watching her with lowering sullen eyes.

"You know it's so," he accused.

"Indeed, it isn't," she lied desperately.

"You think I'm beneath you," he went on hotly.

She didn't think it, she knew it. And she knew, likewise, that she would deny her love rather than stoop to him. The only thing she didn't know was why she cared for him so.

"How silly," she sneered. "I'm not so conceited. You are probably a great deal better than I am."

"Morally, you mean," he retorted, voicing her own miserable, half-formed thoughts and hurling them into her face. "Morally, I'm as good no doubt, but socially I'm beneath you and in this world, morals aren't in it with social rank."

"It isn't so," flamed Nelly, knowing that to a certain extent it was so. "We aren't horrid like that."

"Every one is," said Reuben gloomily. "We would all of us a darned sight rather be in an exclusive set here than go to Heaven."

"I am not horrid," cried Nelly. "I can't explain. I know it's not money, I want. I'd have married Ricky, whether he had a cent or not."

"But unless I have money, I'm beneath you," insisted Reuben. "Money would even things up."

He looked at her with the deep love in his eyes reproaching her, begging for mercy, and the girl's tender heart throbbed faster. She couldn't bear to see that look in his eyes. Her one instinct, her one desire, was to drive it away.

"Oh, Reuben, it isn't so, it isn't so," she cried. "Money is nothing to me. Don't you see it isn't money? If a man fulfilled my ideal, I would love him though he broke stones on the highway." She smiled, tenderly, pleadingly.

For a moment, his wounded love would not relent. Then slowly his face softened, he smiled wistfully and bending his head, gently kissed the small hand on his arm.

When some three hours later, Nelly returned to the house, she came upon the butler surrounded by an animated group of ladies, chatting gaily. The butler, tall and lean, with his long, stupid, pallid face towering above the rest of the group, was frankly nonplussed at this sudden excess of interest in him and his. Chin high in the air, he strove to maintain his dignity and answer the gentle flow of questions with the respect due one in his station.

"Hi do not know," said he, in answer to Mrs. Bingham's gentle query if he believed in suffrage. The probable heir to forty millions would be a good recruit for the "cause." And when better to catch him than now, before any other foolish cause could learn of his worth and seize him?

Mrs. Morgan laughed gaily. "That is quite clever," said she. "Do not compromise yourself, Mr. Hicks."

CHAPTER XXI

SOME SUDDEN DEPARTURES

SAMMY had watched Vera during the last few days growing all the while more and more perplexed, hoping and yet not daring to hope that this Vera revealed to him for the first time was the real Vera, and that the strenuous, working-girls'-friend-no-more-poverty-no-more-trouble-everybody-perfect Vera had somehow disappeared. She seemed lately more like a human being and less like a reformer than she had since the wedding-day. He followed her out on the porch after lunch and drew her diffidently aside to a secluded corner.

"Vera," said he, "I've shut up the apartment, you know, for the summer and am stopping at the club, but—if—er—if you want to come back—"

"Bime by," said Vera gently. "Just now,

Sammy, I am—er—trying to insure Marjory her own father."

"Is he sick?"

"No, but mother and he are getting tired of each other. I've got to show them that we can't quit a duty we have taken upon ourselves just because we are tired of it."

"No," agreed Sammy, in his old lifeless tone. This was the Vera he knew, the strenuous, uplift, Women's Rights Vera. Her tone had penetrated his consciousness before he was able to grasp the full meaning of her words; when he slowly realized what she had said, he turned to her in more surprise. Vera had left him with Reno as her ultimate destination when her visit at her aunt's was over. She would have scorned the suggestion that other than the highest duty moved her westward.

"But, Vera, if they want a divorce—" he questioned.

"They are overgrown children," returned Vera cheerfully. "Each should be spanked. They will get over this mood and like each other again, when I have convinced them that they have to live together for the kids' sakes.

Mother can't imagine now what she got a divorce from my father for."

Sammy thrilled at the wonderful new common sense in his wife's remarks, though he still doubted. "But, Vera, you have always said when a man and woman cease to love each other—"

"Poppycock," laughed Vera. "We get married because we think we love, but it isn't love. It's only passion. True love, Sammy, only comes after years and years together. After the honeymoon and our infatuation dies, we grow tired of each other but if we will only hang on, the right kind of love will come to us and stay, and grow with the years and the children and the trouble."

She paused, blushing and confused in her new-found wisdom. Sammy was on the verge of tears. He caught her hand, regardless of who might see them and leaned toward her with his old-time ardor.

"Vera," he whispered, "we'll hang on, eh, old girl?"

Mrs. Morgan approached before Vera could

do more than smile a shy assent. "Vera," she said, "I have just been talking with Mr. Hicks."

"Mister *Hicks*, mother?"

"The butler. He is a very intelligent man, quite remarkable. A man in the making, my love." Mrs. Morgan sighed. "As soon as the funeral is over, I must leave at once for Reno, but maybe Sammy will take an interest in Hicks, Mr. Hicks. I am convinced that he is the heir."

"Who is the man you are planning to go to Reno on account of, mother?" asked Vera. Sammy discreetly withdrew.

"My dear, you see how it is. When our two souls met and recognized each in the other, his mate, his absolute, identical self, it is not right for me to remain longer with Mr. Morgan."

"When is marriage not a marriage?" asked Vera flippantly.

"When?" asked her mother instinctively.

"When it's a bore," said Vera, with a bit of a yawn. Poor little Marjory was doomed to grow up, it seemed, mentally elongated to fit

several varieties of fathers. "Who is he, mother?"

"Who is who, Vera?"

"Your soul's mate, mother?"

"My dear," protested her mother, and discreetly changed the subject. "I think Mr. Hicks is quite remarkable. I know that this is sudden, terribly sudden, but he is a man of rugged strength, uncultured, perhaps, but of keen intellect, strong, virile, masterful." Again she paused and sighed. "I am sure he is the one to whom your aunt has left her money. Don't you think so, Vera?"

"I haven't the slightest idea, mother."

"You can take Marjory to Aune Belle's can't you, dear, so that I may leave at once for the West?"

"Yes," said Vera, acknowledging defeat, "I can. I do hope he learns not to drop his haighs."

But Mrs. Morgan had caught sight of Appleby on the lawn below the house kindly bestowing a bill on the gardener, and though she could not hear what was said, she judged that it was a loan and that her first husband

was affably waving aside any mention of a return.

"My dear," she cried, turning to Vera, "I do believe your father thinks it is the gardener."

"I don't know what he thinks, mother. I think it is Miss Varney, myself."

"Miss Varney?" questioned her mother, frowning. "I hope not—that is, of course, you know, I wish it had been you, dear."

A strain hung over the house. It was impossible to give an order to a servant without wondering if he or she were soon to be sole heir to forty millions. Inevitably one's voice softened, was a bit more dulcet, a trifle more ingratiating. They had all of them been kind to the servants heretofore, for they were well-bred people, but now there was a difference, indefinable, but nevertheless there.

"It may possibly be Anna," admitted Van Tuyl to Harkness as they smoked in the library. "But personally, I think Miss Varney is the chosen one and that Ricky is a darned lucky chap. He was struck with her right at the beginning and she's certainly gone on him."

"No, sir," contradicted Harkness. "It is Anna. She is deaf and stupid and yet aunt kept her and was sorry for her. It is she aunt would naturally remember in her will."

Van Tuyl nodded thoughtfully. "Maybe that's so," he admitted.

"She isn't really stupid, either," defended Harkness. "It is all due to her deafness. With money enough to go to a specialist, she might entirely recover and become a charming woman."

"If she is the heir, she will have money enough," said Van Tuyl grimly and a trifle bitterly.

"Precisely," agreed Harkness, rising.

He knocked the ashes out of his pipe and strolled carelessly out of the long French window. Slipping quickly around the house, he reentered by the side door and made a roundabout way to the dining-room. It was almost lunch time and Anna would in all probability be there laying the table. And his curiosity was aroused to know just how stupid the heir to forty millions might be. He found her there, standing aside and stolidly watching Van Tuyl

deftly arranging the plates. Van Tuyl was flushed. He had come with the same curiosity that had brought Harkness, and it had been embarrassing talking to the girl; one stood a pretty good chance of being overheard by the family. He flushed still more when he saw Harkness.

"Ah, Tom," said he carelessly.

"Ah, Freddy," stammered Harkness. "Er—er—I thought I heard the bell."

He backed away hastily and hurried out to the porch to be as far away as possible so as not to overhear Van Tuyl's frantic shouts of social gaiety, for Harkness was game. Around the house, on her duty, swinging her billy, came the policewoman and a great throb of peace and joy settled upon Harkness. Here was protection, absolute, enduring, for life. What mattered forty millions?

"Good morning," said he.

She paused, blushed, and stood swinging her stick, smiling at the ground at her feet, one hand making frantic dabs at her hair. For the first time, Harkness noticed that her hair was no longer dragged stiffly back, but was

delightfully curled in tiny tight ringlets across her brow just beneath the visor of her cap. It seemed to Harkness that he had never seen anything quite so sweet. He strove to speak but could find no words adequate to the occasion. "Nice day," he stammered, moistening his lips.

"Yes," said the policewoman, and added with the instinct of the female, since the beginning of time, to flee, "I must be—going."

"Let me go too," cried Harkness, bold now before her evident confusion.

"It's only on my beat," she said.

"Let us beat it together," he whispered ecstatically.

"Where?" she asked.

"To New York," cried Harkness, fired with an inspiration. "We can catch the two-ten, get married in New York and sail to-morrow for Europe."

"All right," said the policewoman simply, and Harkness laughed aloud in exuberance. For the first time in months, he felt perfectly safe as he saw before him the long vista of the sheltered years to come.

Harkness' chair was empty, when half an hour later the family assembled for lunch.

"Where is Tom?" asked Appleby anxiously.

"He said he had to catch the two-ten for the city, on business," answered Ricky. "I met him a moment ago, and he said he had not time for lunch."

"What's he gone to the city for, I wonder," mused Appleby, feeling that as Tom was a client of his he should have consulted him.

"Thank you, Anna," screamed Stephen Mayhew, as Anna handed him his tea.

"Oh, Anna, if you please, just a bit more sugar," yelled Mrs. Bingham, smiling merrily at the girl.

"Where," asked Mrs. Alison Drake Fisher Parker, half rising from her chair, "where is Sadie Fisher?"

"She went this morning," explained Mrs. Morgan. "She couldn't find you and asked me to say good-by to you for her."

"What child did she take?" demanded Mrs. Bingham, Mrs. Von Loben Sels and Mrs. Alison Drake Fisher Parker in one voice.

"Jimmy," laughed Vera reassuringly. "She

said if she remarried a hundred times she would never mistake Jimmy again."

Miss Varney had sent down her excuses and was lunching in her own room. She felt that during this time of strain and anguish, the family should be left to itself as much as possible, to discuss without embarrassment, the disposal of the forty millions. When Anna left the room, Mrs. Bingham nodded her head and declared:

"Positively, I am fully convinced that it is Mrs. Mainwaring."

Appleby nodded. "I shouldn't be surprised. She has been in aunt's service a good many years."

"Why, Henry," cried Mrs. Morgan, "I thought that you thought it was the head gardener."

"He is a very keen man," admitted Appleby slowly. "I talked to him a bit to-day and he really has some unique ideas. He thinks that a man owns his own property. I shouldn't be surprised if aunt had given the business to him."

"I think it is the upper girl," declared Mrs.

Von Loben Sels. "I have engaged her for a nurse. I thought that the poor thing would need a friend, and I didn't see how I could be a friend, you know, unless I had some hold on her. Of course, as soon as she receives the money, she will be a friend of the family, one of us."

For a moment there was a dismayed silence, as each pondered this clever move, then Mrs. Morgan shook her head.

"No," said she, "I know it is Mr. Hicks, a man, every inch of him—"

Mr. Hicks entered at that moment and Mrs. Morgan blushed. He strode straight to her chair and the good lady blushed still redder and tried not to look triumphant. Her tones had been so positive that for the moment all believed she was right.

Without a word, head up, chin out, the swallow-faced Hicks presented her with a small waiter and on it a telegram. In a sympathetic hush, Mrs. Morgan took up the envelope, tore it open and hastily read the message. Once more she read it, more slowly, then she turned bruskly to Hicks.

"Have you a pencil?"

Hicks presented her with one. She cleared a space in front of her and wrote an answer.

"See that that is sent at once," she ordered crisply.

"Yes, ma'am," said Hicks and stalked from the room with the graceful ease of an exceptionally poorly made mechanical toy.

Mrs. Morgan handed the telegram to Vera and rose. "I must catch that two-ten, if I can," said she. "Excuse me, please."

Vera read the telegram hastily and jumping up followed her mother from the room.

"Mother," she asked, catching up with her at the foot of the stairs, "are you going to leave at once for Reno?"

"For Reno? My child, I am going at once to my husband."

"But, mother," gasped Vera, "he says that he has lost everything."

"I know," her mother paused on the top step and wiped her eyes. "Vera, it is so pitiful. He worked so hard and now he hasn't a cent. How can you imagine I could leave him?"

"Oh, mother," cried Vera, with a catch in

her voice, "I know you can't. I think you are fine, mother."

In the midst of her hasty packing, Mrs. Morgan paused and turned to Vera who was frantically folding a waist while the maid had gone to bring in Marjory. "He is so fat," said she, with a half sob. "I can just see him fat and unhappy. There is always something so pathetic about fat people in trouble, and now he hasn't a cent."

Vera stopped and kissed her mother. "Sammy and I can help, dear," she whispered.

Mrs. Morgan shook her head. "Oh, we shall be able to get along somehow. I shall not let him see that I mind at all."

CHAPTER XXII

TWO MORE FIND THE WAY

TO-MORROW Miss Appleby was to be laid with her fathers with all the state and ceremony which became an Appleby. In the afternoon the unfortunate will was to be read to those that remained to hear it. The last dinner was a depressingly quiet meal. To-morrow night, at that time, who would be sitting at the head of the massive mahogany table, mistress of the beautiful place? Could it possibly be Anna, thought Appleby as he meekly drank the weak tea the girl had placed before him, having mistaken his order for a cup of strong coffee, please. Then he glanced at Miss Varney and the horrible uncertainty of the last three days engulfed him. Miss Varney was gravely sweet, quiet and unobtrusive. If she had any hopes of the forty millions, one could not guess it from her serious manners, the retiring deference of a paid com-

panion in the presence of the grief of her employer's family. Yet logic pointed to her as the heir, pointed so conclusively that for the moment Appleby envied Ricky. Nelly and Ricky were bored with each other and could easily think up a few noble sentiments that would entitle them to a divorce.

Appleby strolled into the hall slowly after the others, and pausing a moment to light a cigar, looked up to find that they had all left him, that he was alone. He heard Stephen and his latest in the dining-room, yelling an offer at Anna to enter their employment, and he fancied he caught a sight of Tommy, lingering in the back drawing-room as though to slip in when his turn came. Appleby shrugged wearily. After all it was retribution. All had come with the wild hope of sharing in that forty millions. None had come with the simple intention of seeing their aged kinswoman. She had always been frankly indifferent to them and her indifference had bred theirs. Though she was herself to blame, yet it was pitiful to be old and alone as she had been, dying with no one to care

save how she might dispose of her money. No, decided Appleby philosophically, compared to love money is nothing.

"Hullo, dad, trying to make up your mind whether it is Anna or the up-stairs girl?" asked Vera gaily, coming up behind him and slipping her hand through his arm.

"It may be the butler," said Appleby earnestly, philosophy forgotten. "Your mother seemed to think so."

"I fancy it is the cook," declared Vera. "She is a negro woman, but has been great aunt's cook for years. Er—tainted herself, she wouldn't mind the tainted money."

"Is that so?" said Appleby slowly. "I didn't know that."

Vera nodded. "Yes, I found out this morning. I was talking with Miss Varney. I said it was a shame that so many servants would be thrown out of nice positions and I wondered what the cook would do, for she is—er—getting old, you know, dad, and it would be harder for her to find a place than for the younger ones. Miss Varney said that great-aunt was terribly fond of her and that the law-

yer told her, Miss Varney, that she, the cook, need not worry. Great-aunt had taken care of her. She, Miss Varney, said that the lawyer said he knew great-aunt would want her to know and would have told her herself if she had not died so suddenly. Neither Mrs. Mainwaring nor Miss Varney was permitted to be in the room when the heir was finally decided upon."

"By jove," said Appleby, "it *would* be natural to leave her the money."

"Certainly," declared Vera. "She deserves some reward for all her labors. I think it would be fine—"

A step on the stairs above them drew their startled gaze. Mrs. Mainwaring was descending.

"Dad, you're blushing," whispered Vera. "Why don't you try your luck again?" And with a hasty little pat on his arm she hurried away.

Appleby flushed and wished that Vera had been a bit more delicate in her remark and less hasty in her departure. He liked Mrs. Mainwaring and had liked her for years. She was

a keen observer and a decidedly well-read woman, who thought deeply upon what she read and often reached original and amusing conclusions. She was a gentlewoman and the trouble she had suffered had broadened her and deepened her sympathies, refining her innate sweetness and goodness. Appleby watched her as she descended the wide staircase, with the high stained glass window on the landing behind her, the heavily carved mahogany hand-rail on which her soft white hand rested lightly, and realized that she would not be an unworthy mistress of the beautiful old place, and of the forty millions. Angrily he put the forty millions out of his mind, telling himself that he knew she liked him as he liked her. They were both middle-aged, a bit lonely and ready to settle down, not asking or expecting love, preferring indeed, quiet friendship and congenial companionship. He walked to the foot of the stairs and waited for her. He had been a fool not to have thought of her before in that er—way.

"You look tired," said he gently, as she drew near.

"I am," she replied, "tired and sad. Miss Appleby was very dear to me."

"And you to her," declared Appleby warmly.

"I think so, too," agreed Mrs. Mainwaring with charming simplicity. "I was with her for twenty years."

The unbidden tears showed a moment in her soft gray eyes and she wiped them away frankly with no attempt to apologize for them or to laugh her emotion aside. "Two old women," said she. "Now she's gone and I am alone."

Appleby felt the sudden tears in his own eyes. Of all the household, this woman alone grieved whole-heartedly, with not a thought of the forty millions. "So am I," said Appleby, "old and gray and tired and alone. My wives and my children married and in homes of their own."

"As one grows old, the heart grows so easily satisfied," said she.

"But never with loneliness," protested Appleby. "Then, I think, more than ever, a man wants a woman to go with him, hand in hand, to meet the shadows."

"They are coming so close," said Mrs. Mainwaring softly.

"And coming closer every day," added Appleby, just as softly, gently laying his hand on hers as it rested still on the banisters. "Mrs. Mainwaring, will you marry me? I have admired you for years. We are congenial. We two, I think, are the only ones who really mourn for my aunt. We have much in common. You have enough money to be independent and so have I. We would be happy together, I know."

Mrs. Mainwaring nodded gravely, and held out her hand, looking him steadily in the eyes. "I think we would," she agreed simply. "But we must be honest with each other. Ten years ago I made Miss Appleby promise not to leave me anything, except a few old keepsakes, of no earthly value to any one save to her and to me. I had put by a little, enough to be independent, and I wanted no question of money to come between us. It never did. We loved each other. You must know this and not court me with any expectations."

Her eyes twinkled irresistibly and Appleby

knew he wanted her, money or no money. A sense of humor in a wife is compensation for a hundred millions.

"Woman," said he gently, "I would rather go with you to meet the shadows than with any one else I know."

"But why," she asked smiling, "as I am not to receive the forty millions?"

"I do not know," said Appleby frankly, wanting her the more the more she hesitated. "But I do want you." He put his arm around her shoulders and drawing her to him raised her hand to his lips. "It may be because a woman who has a sense of humor, can never, please God, become a feminist."

CHAPTER XXIII

SAFETY FIRST FOR NELLY

IT was the last night, the last night! They sat side by side on the horse-block in the concealing darkness of the porte-cochére. Nelly felt that her heart was not breaking, but simply stopping, giving out with longing as was her mind, growing weak as were her wabbly knees. The sheer fact of her cowardice sapped all her strength. She wanted him, but she dared not, could not, throw aside her world and take him—dared not, could not, enter his world. It was very dark. The moon would not rise until late and the sky was heavily overcast. She could feel him sitting beside her and could catch an outline of his handsome head if she glanced at him, which she seldom did, for always he was looking straight at her and she could not meet his eyes, even in the shadows of the night.

"Yes," said he grimly, "we strike day after

to-morrow. I have left this place and shall be on the committee to manage the strike. They elected me to-day." His voice was full of unconscious pride and he paused to give her time to congratulate him because of the honor, but she only nodded.

What were strikes and committees to her when life ended to-night? She wondered that he could talk of such things and decided that he did not care as she cared. She told herself that she was glad it was so and suffered anguish at the thought that perhaps he didn't. He mistook her silence for opposition and hastened to defend himself and his friends.

"We have to have justice, somehow. The law is all for the rich man, bought up juries—"

"I know, that is why I hate the poor man so," blazed Nelly. "They allow themselves to be bought."

"Eh?" asked Reuben.

"The rich man's money would be powerless if it wasn't for the poor man's greed," said Nelly hotly.

Reuben preferred to continue and leave that point undisputed. "The rich are a law unto

themselves. Now, look at your cousin, living with a man who isn't her husband and feeling no shame."

"Who?" gasped Nelly.

"Why, that Miss Peters, the one who goes with Mr. Lane."

"Oh, she's married, she and Tommy," explained Nelly hastily. "She just calls herself by her maiden name."

"Why?"

"To avoid confusion, I think," said Nelly doubtfully. "You see if she is always called Miss Brown, she will never become confused as to what her last name is after she has been divorced a number of times. Peters is her grandmother's name and she's decided to begin with her father's."

"Oh!" said Reuben.

For a moment he was silent, then he broke forth again at the old wound: "You don't like me because I have no money."

"It is not so," cried Nelly, the hot tears in her eyes. "Reuben, I do like you."

"You are ashamed of me."

In the dark Nelly blushed at the justice of

his accusation. "I am not, I am not," she cried earnestly, to convince herself.

"I care for you," he rushed on, laying his hand on her knee. "Oh, Nelly, you will never know how much." He choked on a sob and was silent, fighting for his self-control. "Tomorrow, you're going," he went on after a moment, "and what'll become of me? Nelly, I tell you, without you there's no world—for me, no Heaven and no God, only hell."

"Reuben, Reuben," she whispered, all atremble to be in his arms.

He stared before him a moment in the darkness. Behind them, somewhere in the great house, a window was raised, and they heard the catch of the lock as the screen was drawn into place. Off across the lawn, beyond the stables and the meadows, came the whistle of a freight train and the night vibrated with the jarring of its passing. Then Reuben put his elbow on his knee and his chin in his hand, while his other clung to her gown, like a small child fearful of losing its mother. She heard his strangled sob and caught in the darkness the quiver of his broad shoulders.

"Ah, Reuben, don't," she pleaded, laying a hand on his shoulder and leaning toward him in an agony of misery. "Reuben, please, I do care—so much."

He turned on her and crushed her to him fiercely, getting to his feet and dragging her with him.

"Nelly, Nelly," he cried, kissing her hair, her face, anywhere he could find, on her eyes, brow, mouth, and she clung to him in an ecstasy of surrender, conscious only that she loved him and he loved her.

After a time his senses came back and he questioned her with the incredulous joy of the accepted lover. "Sweetheart, you love me?"

"Ah, Reuben," she cried, clinging to him.

"Say it," he begged. "Tell me, dear heart, that you love me."

"I love you," she whispered, and felt him tremble as he pressed her closer.

Long they stayed there in the shadows, now sitting on the horse-block, hand in hand, his arm around her, her head in blessed comfort on his shoulder; now standing, clinging to each other in the joy of their confessed love; now

walking up and down, his arm always around her, her small hands clasped in his. At last she dragged herself away and he followed her to the great front door, where a moment they clung and kissed, then parted, Nelly to creep through the silent house to bed, Reuben to walk and walk, through the grounds, across the meadows to the open country beyond.

Vera was asleep as Nelly slipped into the room and the younger girl did not turn on the light but crept to the open window and curled herself up on the window-seat, too excited to sleep. Long she sat there, gazing out into the darkness, the cool night wind in her face. Slowly her ecstasy passed, slowly the reaction of worn-out nerves began. Try as she might, she could not help but see Mrs. Rubenstein, big and fat and common. She saw the small boy in her arms, with his comical little Jewish face, and her soul sickened. Back in the old country, the rest of the brothers and sisters, what were they like? Peasants, ignorant, illiterate. And what of the father, whom she had never seen, but who, Reuben had told her, had a fine job in a pawn-shop? Gasping for breath, like one

drowning, she raised her hand to her throat and her tortured thoughts rushed on. What, after all, was Reuben but a servant? Not only in position, but in bringing-up, in birth? She could understand, how sometimes, after terrible misfortune, Ricky and his class might have to take a menial's place, but that was different. They themselves were not menials and as soon as possible they would stop doing the menial work. With Reuben, it was no shame, no lowering of himself and his ideals to do low work. He and his *were* menials. They might rise, becoming wealthy, become refined, with the inevitable refinement wealth brings, and then be worthy of her and hers, but now they were servants and the shame that she could stoop to love him nearly killed her, there in the dark. She could smell in fancy the garlic which she always associated with his family, she didn't know why, and could see the loaves of Kosher bread they ate. Then she remembered her promise that as soon as she was free she would marry him. It wasn't he whom she would be marrying, but his family, who ate with their knives,

who poured their tea into their saucers to cool it and then drank it from the saucers, the washwomen and the butchers!

Like a startled animal, she leaped to her feet and stole swiftly, noiselessly, from the room. Somewhere in the great dark silent house, a clock struck three. Quickly she sped down the hall and flew up the second flight of stairs, groping for the banisters by the faint light from the great windows. Breathlessly, she ran along the wide hall to the room which Ricky, Tommy and Sammy were forced by the size of the family to share. But not wishing to disturb the last two, she did not knock, but gently turned the knob and pushed the door open. A moment she hesitated, glancing from bed to bed, at each sonorous sleeper, then reassured that none was about to wake, she stole to Ricky and seized his arm, shaking him gently, firmly, persistently.

"Ricky, Ricky," she called in a whisper of agonized haste.

"Huh," grunted Ricky, suddenly aroused and sitting up. "Huh? What's the matter?"

"Ricky, hush, it's I," pleaded Nelly. "Get up. I'll wait for you in the hall. Come as quickly as you can."

She hurried out, and presently, half dressed and wholly dazed, he joined her at the alcove where she waited.

"Oh, Ricky," she cried, catching hold of his arm, "take me away from here!"

"Yes, indeed," said Ricky promptly, drawing her to him. "Don't fret, Nelly, we will go directly after breakfast is over."

"I want to go now," cried Nelly, sobbing. "Oh, Ricky, take me now."

"There, there," soothed Ricky. "We can't go now, dear—"

"We can, Ricky. There is a milk train at five. We can catch it."

"Our trunks—"

"Oh, Ricky, I can't wait. We can each take a suit-case and send back for the trunks. I have to go, I must. I can't see any one again. I want to get away while it's dark, before he knows I'm going."

Ricky thought of Miss Varney and of the forty millions, and shrugged them heroically

aside, unconscious that he was heroic. Nelly was apparently in trouble and needed him, and that he must take care of her was his only thought. He patted her gently on the shoulder.

"All right, skipper," said he jovially and yet tenderly, "it's as you say."

"I'll be ready in ten minutes," said Nelly, sniffing violently. "Meet me at the foot of the stairs in the lower hall."

"All right, little girl," replied Ricky, suppressing a yawn until she had disappeared down the darkened hall.

CHAPTER XXIV

A REFORMED SOCIALIST

THE funeral was over and luncheon was finished. Nelly and Ricky's sudden disappearance had been exclaimed over and wondered about, and now, what remained of the family was assembled in the library, waiting the arrival of the lawyer and the will. All had given up hope and yet all hoped, and would keep on hoping until the end. It was just possible that Miss Varney was mistaken. Any tentative suggestion toward breaking the will, if the worst happened, was waved aside.

"You can't break a will any more nowadays than you can a woman's heart," sneered Van Tuyl, suddenly turned cynical.

"Women are no longer fools," declared Maude, who could argue on any and all occasions. "We have our own interests nowadays."

"I know, Maudie," agreed Van Tuyl, "but

just confess that the most interesting thing to a woman is a man."

"Indeed, I will not, for it isn't," cried Maude. Tommy had been away since immediately after breakfast, missing both the funeral and lunch, and she scorned to show her anxiety as to his whereabouts by asking if any one had seen him or knew where he was.

The butler appeared in the doorway and all drew a relieved breath, having mistaken his step for the lawyer's, thankful for a moment to postpone the evil hour.

"Mr. Van Fleet, the phone, sir," said Hicks.

Sammy withdrew leaving Maude still in possession of the floor.

"Hullo."

"Hullo," said a weak voice from the other end of the line. "That you, Sammy?"

"Yes," said Sammy. "Who's this?"

"Me—Tommy."

"Oh, Tommy? Hullo, what's the matter?"

"Nothing."

"Oh."

"Hullo."

"Hullo."

"I say, Sammy, why—er—Anna—er—she has just joined me—"

"Eh? Say it again."

"Anna and I are going away together."

"Great heavens, man," groaned Sammy, forgetful that he might be overheard, "she may not inherit the money."

"Damn the money," snarled Tommy. "I love her. She's a woman and not an individual. She's deaf and I can talk a lot to her without her jumping on me and disagreeing with everything I say." His voice grew higher and higher as he continued and the wires hummed shrilly as though echoing his soul's protest at the long fruitless years just passed. "She doesn't say much, just yes and no, thank God. She listens, though, all the time, even if she can't hear. Are you there?"

"Yes," gasped Sammy.

"She's going to wait for me to get a divorce. She's going to stop off in Detroit at her sister's and I'm going on to Reno. Can you hear me?"

"Yes," groaned Sammy.

"Maude can get a divorce for desertion, if I can't, then I'll marry Anna. Say, Sammy, she's

promised that when we're married, she'll call herself Mrs. Thomas Lane." His voice thrilled into ecstasy and Sammy nearly lost the words so loud the wires hummed. "You there?"

"Yes, I'm here."

"I—I—er—I want you to tell Maude."

"Hi, there, Tommy, hold on," cried Sammy, but only the buzz of the broken connection answered him.

He saw Hicks looking at him coldly, impersonally, from his station at the front door. He beckoned to him.

"Hicks, get a cab and put my things and Mrs. Van Fleet's into it. I am going to the station now and won't wait until the will is read. Have it at the side door where no one will see."

"Yes, sir."

Sammy went to the desk in the hall and wrote two notes, one to Maude and one to Vera, then he gave them to Hicks to deliver and slipped cautiously out of the side door to the waiting cab. The rattle of the departing cab, clearly heard in the library, again raised the agony of hope deferred and Hicks' entrance was upon an impressive, though nervous, hush.

Stolidly he presented his notes and withdrew while a sigh of relief at another respite followed him.

"Dear Vera," Vera read. "Tommy has run away with Anna. He wants me to break it to Maude. I wouldn't face her for the forty millions. I have written her. Come to the station directly the agony's over. Sammy."

Vera glanced at Maude fearfully as Maude slowly read her note. A deep red crept into her cousin's cheeks and then sank. Maude raised her eyes and stared dully before her, then crushing the note in her hand, she rose.

"Maude," cried Mrs. Von Loben Sels, "are you ill?"

"No," said Maude, her face ghastly.

Cally went to her and tried to slip her arm around her waist, but Maude pushed her coldly away and with a slight inclination of her head to the others, went quickly out, Cally following humbly after her. Vera had half risen to go to her cousin, but she was popular with the men and Maude was not and she knew her advances would be scorned as condescension, so she sank back again into her big chair.

Up-stairs strode Maude, and up-stairs, after her, trotted the humble Cally. In her room, Maude sat down suddenly on the bed. Cally sat down meekly beside her.

"Maude," she pleaded, "can't I help you bear it?"

Maude shook her head, staring before her with drawn face and wretched eyes, then suddenly the tension snapped and she bowed her head in her hands, sobbing pitifully. Cally's arms went around her and drew her head to Cally's breast and Cally's soft small voice crooned to her as a mother would. In complete surrender Maude clung to the little woman and sobbed out her grief.

The hubbub of excitement over Maude was interrupted immediately by the long expected entrance of the lawyer. Everybody drew a deep breath and stirred nervously. There were many greetings and handshakes, chairs were moved, papers rustled and they finally got down to business. The lawyer drew forth the will, opened it slowly and slowly put it down. Then he took out and carefully adjusted his eye-glasses, being particular to wipe them thor-

oughly with his handkerchief. Slowly he took out the handkerchief, blew his nose and returned the handkerchief to his pocket. Again he picked up the will, glanced at it a moment, read a few words to himself and again lowered the papers and glanced over his glasses at the others. There was no one present but the family, both Miss Varney and Mrs. Mainwaring having preferred to remain away. It would be a painful occasion at best and the family should have at least privacy in which to receive the shock of the certainty.

The lawyer cleared his throat. "Of course," said he slowly, precisely, "you are all aware that this is Miss Appleby's last will and testament."

There was a polite murmur of assent.

"She has made this will, I feel compelled to advise you, exceptionally hard to break, if any of you so contemplated," said the lawyer and glanced from face to face over his glasses.

Again there was a polite murmur of assent.

"I trust that none of you will be disappointed, h'm."

"No," said some one and the others nodded

while their hearts sank and the last glimmer of hope died out.

"Miss Appleby was very eccentric," proceeded the lawyer, removing his glasses and thoughtfully tapping the will with them. "She had lived alone so long she had lost touch with the march of the times." He paused and the room was absolutely still. Again he glanced from one to the other, again put down the will and again slowly, impressively, adjusted his eye-glasses and picked up the will. Once more he cleared his throat and then began to read, in a deep sonorous voice.

The preamble was not heard, the first few minor bequests fell on deaf ears. All were waiting for the final clause, the disposal of the residue of the estate, the forty millions.

"The residue of my estate, both real and personal," read the deep grave voice, and not another sound was heard as all leaned a bit forward. "The residue of my estate, both real and personal, I do give and bequeath, outright, to one Reuben Rubenstein, my fourth assistant gardener, and his heirs and assigns, forever."

There followed a few more instructions, the

name of the executor who was to serve with said Reuben Rubenstein until the estate was settled, and a clause as to the breaking of the will, but nobody heard any more. Reuben Rubenstein heir to forty millions, to the great house, the land, the button factory! Reuben Rubenstein! Who was he? Had any of them seen him? Reuben Rubenstein, fourth assistant gardener!

Reuben Rubenstein looked across the table, littered with papers, at the foreman of the button factory who had been called to the great house for a consultation.

"Now, Pope, as to the strike," said Reuben Rubenstein, while the executor who was to serve with him under heavy bonds, nodded grimly. "Let the men know at the beginning that if they strike, it will be a fight to the finish, to the finish, understand, and their finish will come before mine. I refuse absolutely to be blackmailed, and that's all a strike is. Those men are getting good wages. What they need is more grit and ability and determination to get on. Let them work hard and save their

money. Any man nowadays can rise if it's in him. It all simply depends on the man himself. I shall run my business as I see fit and I refuse to be dictated to. This is my property. If a man doesn't like his job he can quit. But as long as there is justice in America," said Reuben Rubenstein, "I shall run my own affairs as I damn please. Understand!"

THE END

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